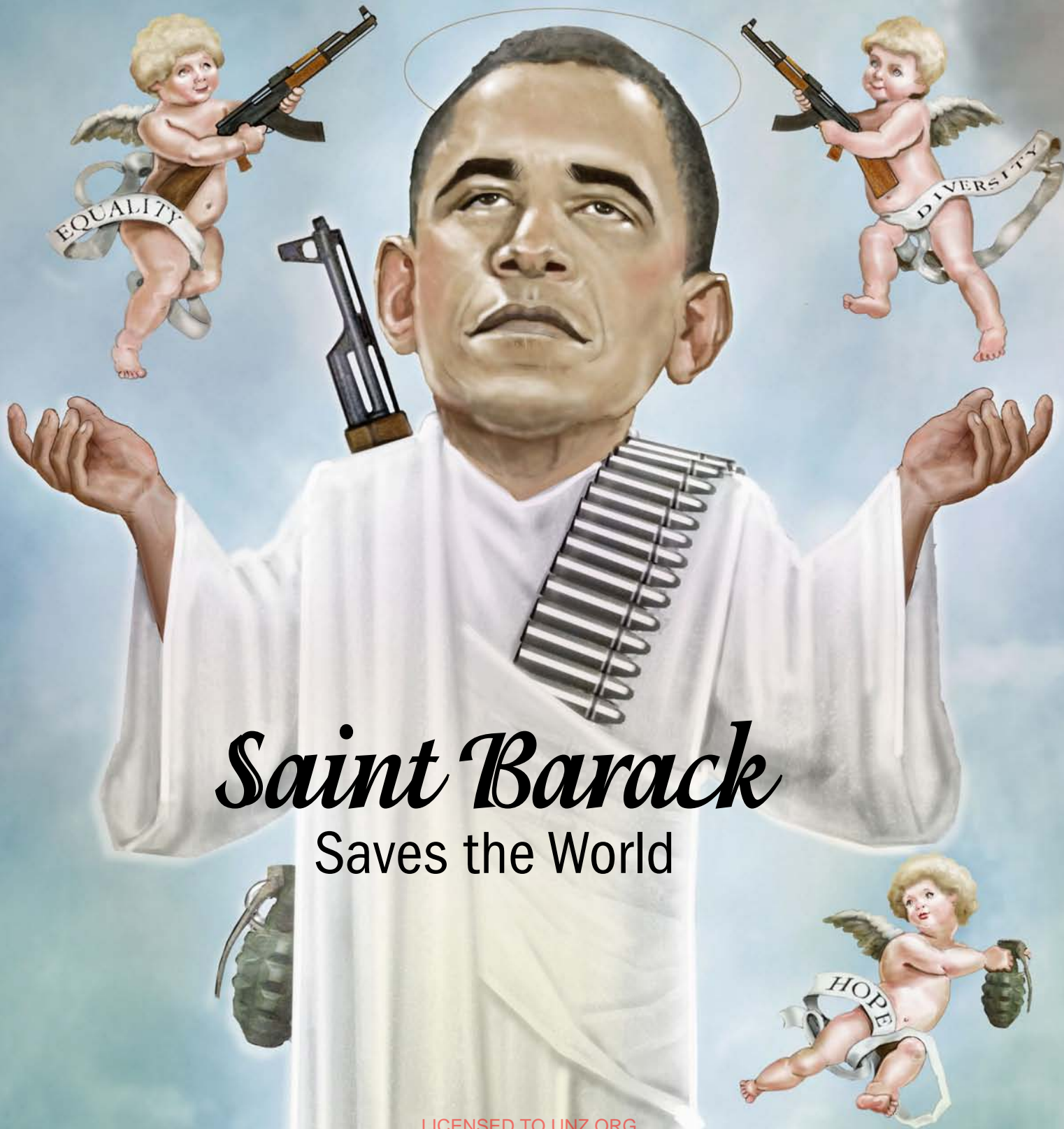


FEBRUARY 25, 2008

The American Conservative



Saint Barack
Saves the World

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I DENY

It is impossible to find ways strong enough to deny the reckless and absurd allegations about me in Philip Giraldi's article ("Found in Translation," Jan. 28). They are completely false and malicious.

MARC GROSSMAN
Washington, D.C.

MISSING MITT

Thank you for your cover art and articles regarding the pathology of John McCain (Feb. 11). The question remains, however, how do we stop him from further infecting the electorate?

I was a Romney supporter despite his apparent support for continuing the administration's policies in Iraq because I believed that he was the only candidate with the skills necessary to put the pieces of our economic policy and foreign policy to work together for peace and prosperity. While I was disappointed that he suspended his campaign, I was even more disappointed that he stated that he agrees with John McCain on "doing whatever it takes to be successful in Iraq," and that he can't allow his campaign to be a part of "aiding a surrender to terror." The truth of the matter, as your articles demonstrate, is that allowing John McCain to launch a national campaign aids terror.

The only thing McCain knows is war, and the only thing he can promise our great nation is more of the same. He's been at war with his own party his entire career—his maverick positions and much publicized compromises across the aisle are just his passive-aggressive way of winning his mad war and achieving his heroic fantasies. If Americans are looking for a fight, John McCain will find them a war. If he can't find one, he'll start one. And if he can't start one alone, he'll get his buddies Rudy Giuliani and Joe Lieberman to help.

John McCain is the Al Sharpton of the terror threat. He wants peace as much as the Reverend Al wants racial equality.

Without racial injustice—real or imagined—the Reverend would be out of the limelight, out of money, and out of a job. Without an enemy—real or imagined—John McCain could not come off as the hero he so desperately needs to be.

Do those who cast their votes for him not realize that if his sophomoric war-mongering were allowed to play itself out on the world stage, it could destroy our greatness? Or could the pathology of John McCain be his voters' own?

HELENE JNANE
New York, N.Y.

LET MY PEOPLE GO

Has Scott McConnell not been able to break the shackles of his *Commentary* days ("Untested Savior," Jan. 28)? Must he tailor *TAC* opinions to suit his old neocon associates? As editor of a magazine calling itself *The American Conservative*, one would expect allegiance to traditional American experience. Why doesn't he think of his true audience as the core America, not the self-considered elites from the Beltway and Central Park West?

By definition, a nation consists of a nationality. And historically, a nationality was based on a discrete ethnic group within a distinctively perceived race with its own attendant culture. America, because of its history of principle settlement from Britain and later immigration from many different parts of Europe, defined itself with a European demographic and British-birther core cultural identity. To quote Shelby Steele approvingly that America "has undergone a moral evolution away from racism so transformative that there is now something like a desire in the body politic to see a truly qualified black person in the White House" indicates that McConnell doesn't understand what constitutes a nation. To suggest that Obama's "post-Americanism" might be a transcendent quality and his "hybridization" a distinct virtue is ludicrous. Furthermore, McConnell writes, "Not only is he plausi-

ble, his candidacy implicitly promises the healing of America's oldest wound." Really! And what wound is that? Oh, "racism"! The anti-Western disease is so pervasive that even putative paleoconservatives must pose as self-hating and guilt-ridden.

History affords no example of successful countries based on amorphous ethnic-racial identities. Always there is a core majoritarian group. The only possible exceptions are in the special cases of authoritarian empires. But then these are not nations nor countries and certainly not free republics.

The 6,000-year record of political groupings into communities, city-states, and nations should indicate that ethnic and racial separateness is a natural process, and to artificially tamper with this tendency is to attempt to render human nature irrelevant. As Alexander Solzhenitsyn said during his Nobel Prize lecture, "nations are the wealth of mankind, its collective personalities; the very least of them wears its own special colors and bears within itself a special facet of divine intention."

Laws of nature and social-political dynamics will always reassert themselves and return to the channels of least resistance. This returning can be messy and violent if prior redress was suppressed. Because the majoritarian Eurocore has been demeaned, diminished, and displaced through the antagonistic acts of a small but powerful elite, when the pendulum inevitably swings back, I suspect that assertive devolution will be the response.

RICK JOHNSON
Coeur d'Alene, Idaho

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[DISSENT]

PRIMARY REASON FOR GOP LOSSES

Wayne Gilchrest, a nine-term incumbent and one of a handful of antiwar House Republicans, lost his primary to state senator Andy Harris. The closely watched Maryland race tested whether the GOP, after the electoral “thumping” of 2006, would rather risk losing seats to Democrats than allow Republicans who reject Bush’s democracy project to remain in office. Gilchrest’s fall is an ominous sign for GOP dissenters like Walter Jones and even Ron Paul.

In 2008, Republicans already face the challenge of replacing over two dozen retiring House members and fending off political realignment in states like Illinois and Virginia. And just two years ago, when Republicans challenged the centrist war opponent Sen. Lincoln Chafee in Rhode Island, they helped ensure the demise of their majority in the upper chamber.

Gilchrest, a moderate on taxes and the environment, embodied the political divisions of his district, where the number of registered Democrats and Republicans is nearly even. When he opposed the surge and called for a deadline for withdrawal, hawks flew in for the kill, and 527 groups like the Club for Growth piled on, hoping to run up their score against a weakened opponent. It is a foolish electoral strategy to demand tests of loyalty to a president and war effort that have such abysmal approval ratings. But the “Stupid Party” always learns the hard way. In 2008, the lesson will surely be that endless wars are not only bad policy but bad politics.

[ELECTION]

CAMPAIGNING WHERE THE VOTERS AREN'T

As we covered Mike Huckabee’s unconventional campaign, *TAC* found a candidate willing to differ from the neocon

consensus. But his Super Tuesday strategy left us perplexed. Publishing an op-ed in the *Jerusalem Post* suggests some confusion about which country he’s bidding to lead.

The man who in December courageously suggested that Bush’s foreign policy had been “arrogant” and stated that containment was the most sensible way to deal with Iran lost his bearings. He promised to stay in Iraq until the war is “won,” claiming those who don’t understand that the occupation is a “critical part of the war on terror don’t get it.”

The most charitable thing one can say about this fealty to the occupy-Iraq-for-ever crowd is that it is geopolitically illiterate. The American occupation of Iraq is a gift that keeps on giving to Muslim extremists. The more Iraqis we kill, the more Islamist propaganda resonates throughout the Muslim world.

Huckabee went on to claim that nobody was “more steadfastly committed to Israel’s security” than he, making us wonder where America’s security falls in his calculus. He promised the “military option” against Iran would remain on the table, then veered off into boilerplate about “Islamofascism,” the neoconservative agitprop word that suggests all Muslims are potential Hitlerites.

We don’t know what lay behind Huckabee’s turn from his realism of a few months ago. But this rant strips much

shine from a candidacy that had shown promise and saddened many who hoped that Huckabee would help Republicans turn the page from a failed Bush foreign policy.

[EDUCATION]

LEWIS AND WHO?

USA Today reports on whom American teenagers select as the “most famous Americans in history,” presidents not included. Topping the list, naturally, is Martin Luther King Jr., the only American with his own national holiday. Close behind are Rosa Parks and Harriet Tubman. Benjamin Franklin, the first white male, comes in at number five. Oprah Winfrey beats out Thomas Edison for the seventh spot.

The Stanford professor who did the study remarks that it shows a profound change in how Americans view history—an understatement indeed. The national story has shifted from emphasis on the founders and builders of the nation to the narrative of “expanding rights.” Forgotten along with the Marshalls and Henrys and Paines are those who forged the American West, built the country’s industrial strength, and fought its wars—not to mention inventors, authors, and scientists.

The Tubman choice is emblematic. She is African American and a woman and surely exemplary—which makes

her an ideal choice for “self-esteem” instruction under the guise of history lessons. A generation ago, William F. Buckley wondered who in the world Harriet Tubman was and, if she was more important than Stalin, why he had never heard of her.

Today’s students wouldn’t suffer that knowledge gap. Whether they have heard of Stalin is another matter.

[CULTURE]

DUTCH RETREAT

Lent has never been an easy sell. Ashes don’t rate in the glamour department and fasting doesn’t exactly suit the mass palate. But the Netherlands is making a novel bid to popularize the season of penitence: Why not call it Ramadan instead?

No need to worry that a generation of Dutch tots will be confused when Easter preparation is rechristened after a month in the Islamic calendar. “Ramadan is a better-known concept among young people than Lent,” according to Martin Can der Kuil, director of the Dutch Catholic charity Vastenactie. The theological implications don’t trouble him either: “The agreements are more striking than the differences.” He seems oblivious to the fact that the Netherlands isn’t a Muslim country.

Not yet anyway—though the long surrender is well underway: the Netherlands is now home to one million Muslims. More accurately, it’s where they live. According to a recent poll, only 9 percent of Dutchmen think “Muslims do enough to integrate into Dutch society.”

But perhaps this failure isn’t entirely the fault of Islamic immigrants. A country that lacks the confidence to maintain its cultural markers offers nothing to assimilate into. Indeed, Westerners might take a lesson from the tenacity with which these newcomers cling to their traditions. We clearly place little value on our own.

“And the wind shall say ‘Here were decent godless people...’”

[WAR]

KNOWN UNKNOWNNS

In 2004, the Army asked the quasi-official RAND Corporation for an analysis of lessons learned in the Iraq War. After 18 months, researchers produced a report called “Rebuilding Iraq” in both unclassified and secret versions.

It was understandably critical of Iraq planning at every level and unsparing of the Defense Department, key generals, President Bush, and Condoleezza Rice. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the Army took immediate steps to squelch the work, giving the anodyne comment that “some of the RAND findings were determined to be outside the purview of the Army.”

The *New York Times* got a summary of the suppressed document, which not only documents the interagency squabbling and poor co-ordination that preceded the war, but reveals something akin to a conscious effort on the part of planners to avoid exploring anticipated difficulties because they might not like the answers they would find: “Building public support for any pre-emptive or preventive war is inherently challenging since by definition action is being taken before the threat has fully manifested itself. Any serious discussion of the cost and challenges of reconstruction might undermine efforts to build that support.”

Simple translation: the Bush team didn’t want to find out in advance how difficult occupying Iraq would be because it feared the American people then wouldn’t support the invasion. It wasn’t a matter of mistaken intelligence or poor planning but a conscious decision not to know what it would be like for Americans to invade and occupy a major Arab country.

This goes beyond simple negligence. Given the cost of the war in lives lost and wrecked, the damage done to Iraq and to America’s good name, even calling it criminal understates the matter. ■

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The American Conservative, Vol. 7, No. 4, February 25, 2008 (ISSN 1540-966X). Reg. U.S. Pat. & Tm. Off. TAC is published 24 times per year, biweekly (except for January and August) for \$49.97 per year by The American Conservative, LLC, 1300 Wilson Blvd., Suite 120, Arlington, VA, 22209. Periodicals postage paid at Arlington, VA, and additional mailing offices. Printed in the United States of America. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *The American Conservative*, P.O. Box 9030, Maple Shade, NJ 08052-9030.

Subscription rates: \$49.97 per year (24 issues) in the U.S., \$54.97 in Canada (U.S. funds), and \$89.97 other foreign, via airmail. Back issues: \$6.00 (prepaid) per copy in USA, \$7.00 in Canada (U.S. funds).

For subscription orders, payments, and other subscription inquiries —

By phone: **800-579-6148**

(outside the U.S./Canada 856-380-4131)

Via Web: www.amconmag.com

By mail: *The American Conservative*, P.O. Box 9030, Maple Shade, NJ 08052-9030

When ordering a subscription please allow 4–6 weeks for delivery of your first issue.

Inquiries and letters to the editor should be sent to letters@amconmag.com. For advertising sales or editorial call 703-875-7600.

This issue went to press on February 14, 2008.

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[heralding the hawk]

Make the World Safe for Hope

Can Barack Obama, who campaigns as an icon of peace, actually be more bellicose than Bush? Yes, he can.

By Brendan O'Neill

OBAMA-MANIA is getting out of hand. Full-grown and well-educated men—from swooning Andrew Sullivan to the entire staff of *GQ* magazine—are developing “man crushes” on Barack Obama, going weak in the knees for his immaculately pressed suits, oratorical skills, and shameless hope-mongering.

“I’ve never wanted anyone more than I want you,” warbles Obama Girl in a song called “I Got a Crush on Obama,” which has been viewed over 6 million times on YouTube. Celebs are queuing up to fall at his feet. “My heart belongs to Barack,” says Scarlett Johansson. There’s a palpable whiff of semi-religious hysteria at Obama rallies. As Joel Stein wrote in the *Los Angeles Times*, “Obamaphilia has gotten creepy,” and its “fanatical” adherents are starting to embarrass themselves.

Actually, it’s worse than that: they are deluding themselves. Many Democrats have become so goggle-eyed, so insanely convinced that Obama is the savior of American politics (potentially rescuing both the Democratic Party from political ruin and America herself from the decadence and violence of the Bush era), that they are beginning to suffer political hallucinations. They fantasize that he is pure and righteous, a miracle-worker who, in a pique of rage, will overturn the conventions of neocon-ruled America.

The blind hope in Obama-as-messiah is most clearly expressed in the widespread delusion that he would be a “president of peace,” welcomed by a world eager to bury the warmongering ways of the office’s former occupant and renew its respect for America. Columnist Michael Kinsley praised Obama’s “valuable experience ... as what you might call a ‘world man’—Kenyan father, American mother, four formative years living in Indonesia, more years in the ethnic stew of Hawaii, middle name of Hussein, and so on—in an increasingly globalized world.” But from my sedate Obamarama-free home in London, I’m not cheered by the prospect of this “world man” in the White House. Rather, I see him for what he is—or for what he threatens to become. Having never been stirred by the sight of Obama giving an MLK-style speech on the need for change, I can only take the candidates at their words. And Obama’s words are ominous indeed.

President Obama would be a war-monger. He would be a wide-eyed, zealous interventionist who would not think twice about using America’s “military muscle” (his words) to overthrow “rogue states” and to suppress America’s enemies, real and imagined. He would go farther even than President Bush in transforming the globe into

America’s backyard and staffing it with spies and soldiers. He would relish the “American mission” to police the world and topple tyrannical regimes.

After eight years of Bush’s military meddling in the Middle East, if you want more war, vote Obama.

Two myths must be exploded: first, that Barack Obama was a principled and passionate opponent of the war in Iraq; second, that if he were installed in the White House he would resist the temptation to launch new wars and would instead usher in an era of peace.

Iraq is the Obamabots’ favorite fault-line in the clash of the two Democrat contenders: Clinton supported the invasion and Obama opposed it. An open-and-shut case of one candidate being “for the war” and the other being “against the war,” right? Not quite. Obama’s position over the past five years has been strikingly similar to Clinton’s. And that ought to be an issue of serious concern for Obama’s army of acolytes and the peace protesters who have latched on to his campaign because, as Jeff Taylor pointed out in *Counterpunch*, “Clinton herself provides no substantive alternative to the neoconservative philosophy of the Bush administration.” Obama is little different from Clinton, and Clinton is little different from Bush.

Obama's campaign frequently invokes his 2002 "speech against the war," but very rarely quotes directly from it. Why? Because this mysterious speech—which has become the stuff of legend in Obamaphilic circles, talked about but rarely read—is a pro-war tirade. Yes, Obama described the planned invasion of Iraq as "dumb" and "rash," but his overriding concern—expressed repetitively throughout the speech—was that the Bush administration was damaging the legitimate case for American-made wars of intervention and potentially making it harder for future administrations (Democratic, for example) to send soldiers around the world to depose unfriendly regimes.

Obama gave the speech at an antiwar rally in Chicago in October 2002. Perhaps nervous about being seen at a gathering of critics of American military intervention, he straight away outlined his pro-war credentials: "Let me begin by saying that although this has been billed as an anti-war rally, I stand before you as someone who is not opposed to war in all circumstances." He reiterated his non-opposition to war another four times in the 921-word speech.

Then Obama went to Washington, where he obediently voted to fund the war in Iraq and opposed the withdrawal of American troops. In 2004, he even talked about sending more troops to Iraq to stabilize the country—he had the idea of a surge before the Bushies did. When he and Hillary Clinton had a chance to enact Sen. Russ Feingold's measure ordering Bush to withdraw most U.S. troops from Iraq by July 1, 2007, both voted no. Both senators also voted against a June 2006 amendment proposed by John Kerry for the redeployment of U.S. troops out of Iraq. It wasn't until May 2007 that Clinton and Obama voted to cut off funds.

It is a myth, pure bunkum, that Obama is a brave anti-warrior. He made

a brief speech in 2002—peppered with reminders of his generally pro-war leanings—and then, like Clinton, used his muscle in the Senate to fund the war and extend its bloody duration. It is only during the past year, as he has thrown himself into the presidential race, that Obama has decided to pose as a long-standing, level-headed critic. As Taylor argues, "An adept politician, Obama began emphasizing his 'anti-war' stance as the war became increasingly unpopular among Democrats across the country and he began gearing up for the 2008 presidential campaign."

But there is more going on here than Iraq-related opportunism. If elected president, Obama would make it a priority to smash the argument for non-interventionism and to rehabilitate America's imperial mission to right the wrongs of the world.

THOSE **FOOLISHLY CHEERING OBAMA'S PROMISE** TO BRING THE WAR IN IRAQ TO A **"RESPONSIBLE END"** SHOULD RECOGNIZE WHY HE IS PLANNING THIS: NOT TO LIBERATE IRAQ BUT RATHER **TO LIBERATE THE INTERVENTIONIST PROJECT** FROM THE **"IRAQI DISTRACTION."**

His main beef with the war in Iraq is not that it has failed in its stated objectives, fomented terror, and killed thousands, but rather that it has made the American people skeptical about military intervention. "There is one ... place where our mistakes in Iraq have cost us dearly, and that is the loss of our government's credibility with the American people," he says. Citing a Pew Survey that found that 42 percent of Americans agree that the U.S. should "mind its own business internationally and let other countries get along the best they can on their own," Obama retorted, "We cannot afford to be a country of isolationists right now. ... We need to maintain a

strong foreign policy, relentless in pursuing our enemies and hopeful in promoting our values around the world."

Those foolishly cheering Obama's promise to bring the war in Iraq to a "responsible end" should recognize why he is planning this: not to liberate Iraq but rather to liberate the interventionist project from the "Iraqi distraction" and rebuild America's military sufficiently to send its forces to hotspots around the globe. In a long piece for *Foreign Affairs* in July/August 2007, he argued, "After Iraq, we may be tempted to turn inward. That would be a mistake. The American moment is not over, but it must be seized anew. We must bring the war to a responsible end and then renew our leadership—military, diplomatic, moral—to confront new threats and capitalize on new opportunities." He calls for adding 65,000 soldiers to the

Army and 27,000 to the Marine Corps and vastly expanding their mission. "[D]eposing a dictator and setting up a ballot box" is not enough: Obama wants \$50 billion to promote "sustainable democracy," a gauzy scheme that aims to "build healthy and educated communities, reduce poverty, develop markets, and generate wealth."

Yet for all his focus on the "politics of hope," when it comes to outlining his program of international interventionism, Obama parrots precisely the Bush regime's panic-packed arguments about the horrendous threats facing America. Paying tribute to earlier battles against fascism and Soviet communism, Obama

said last year, "This century's threats are at least as dangerous and in some ways more complex than those we have confronted in the past. They come from weapons that can kill on a mass scale and from global terrorists who respond to alienation or perceived injustice with murderous nihilism. They come from rogue states allied to terrorists and from rising powers that could challenge both America and the international foundation of liberal democracy." Here, Obama the celebrated new Democrat sounds startlingly like the clapped-out dinosaurs of the neocon project. Like

said, "We have heard much over the last six years about how America's larger purpose in the world is to promote the spread of freedom." The anticipated twist never came. "I agree," Obama told the crowd. Turns out we haven't done enough to mold the world in America's image: "America must lead by reaching out to all those living disconnected lives of despair in the world's forgotten corners."

Making Bush's foreign policy look nearly as "humble" as initially promised, Obama declared that America's security is "inextricably linked to the security of

"American hegemony" so that we can continue to fulfill our "responsibility to lead the world." Obama has updated this outlook in PC, Democrat-friendly lingo: "The mission of the U.S. is to provide global leadership grounded in the understanding that the world shares a common security and a common humanity." Little wonder that Kagan sees in Obama a kindred spirit: "Obama believes the world yearns to follow us," he writes. "Personally, I like it."

If President Obama pursued a neocon foreign policy, only with a touch more East Coast-style diplomacy than was ever employed by the Stetson-wearing Bush, that would be bad enough. But he might actually be worse than the neocons.

Obama continually criticizes the Bush administration for pursuing its interests on the international stage instead of spreading "values" and "principles." He says Iraq was a war based "not on principle but on politics." Yet if there could be anything worse than the Bush foreign policy, it would be Obama's principled meddling. At least interventions driven by narrow interests and politics have some kind of endpoint: when the interest has been protected or the political goal realized, the intervention might come to an end. Obama, by contrast, inflamed by his self-defined "values" and motivated by a vision of good versus evil in which it is America's role to lead the world toward its "common humanity," would be more reckless and unwieldy than Bush ever was. There is nothing quite so dangerous as a well-armed leader convinced that he has an historic moral purpose on the world stage.

Barack Obama's Inaugural Address wouldn't require much work: George W. Bush delivered the first draft in 2005. ■

Brendan O'Neill is editor of Spiked in London. (spiked-online.com)

MAKING BUSH'S FOREIGN POLICY LOOK NEARLY AS "HUMBLE" AS INITIALLY PROMISED, OBAMA DECLARED THAT AMERICA'S SECURITY IS "INEXTRICABLY LINKED TO THE SECURITY OF ALL PEOPLE," OPINING THAT FLU-STRICKEN INDONESIAN CHICKENS AND LATIN AMERICAN CORRUPTION PUT AMERICANS AT RISK.

them, he compares today's shoddy and stateless terror networks to the powerful regimes of fascist Germany and Soviet Russia. And like them he suggests that America is threatened by "weapons that can kill on a mass scale"—a dark hint at the much feared "dirty nuke," the existence of which has never been established, either in al-Qaeda's caves or in the nuclear facilities of Iran.

Besides plagiarizing the Bush regime's book of fear-mongering, Obama embraces two other aspects of Bushite foreign policy: unilateralism and pre-emption. He argues, "No president should ever hesitate to use force—unilaterally if necessary—to protect ourselves and our vital interests when we are attacked or imminently threatened."

Those expecting the age of Obama to bring a repudiation of the Bush agenda hope in vain. In a speech to the Chicago Council on Global Affairs last April he

all people," opining that flu-stricken Indonesian chickens and Latin American corruption put Americans at risk. No, they don't. Obama's stress on how everything is interconnected not only sets up the United States to intervene everywhere, but it makes any coherent strategy impossible. If every problem is an American problem, how would Obama set priorities or address one crisis instead of another? It's a question he hasn't begun to answer.

Neoconservatives are only too happy to fill in the blank. In a *Washington Post* column entitled "Obama the Interventionist," Robert Kagan celebrated the repudiation of the realist consensus: "Obama's speech ... was pure John Kennedy, without a trace of John Mearsheimer." In 1996, Kagan co-wrote with Bill Kristol a *Foreign Affairs* essay entitled "Toward a Neo-Reaganite Foreign Policy," which argued that U.S. foreign policy should seek to preserve

[nuclear family]

Defining Deterrence Down

What's the return address of a non-state actor with a bomb?

By James Kurth

THE NUCLEAR AGE was inaugurated by the largest and most advanced industrial power in history, the United States. Only the greatest of great powers had the capacity to mobilize the vast and diverse resources necessary to acquire the first nuclear weapons. The U.S. then announced the advent of the new age with a big bang, over Hiroshima and again over Nagasaki.

The next power to acquire nuclear weapons was the only other superpower, the Soviet Union. Although never as super as the United States, the Soviets possessed the second-largest industrial capacity in the world, so it was altogether natural that the USSR took silver in the nuclear-weapons race.

Neither was it surprising that the next states to join the club were also major industrial powers, although not really super ones—Britain in 1952, France in 1960, and China in 1964. When India tested its “nuclear device” in 1974 (it did not then call it a nuclear weapon), even this merely developing economy did not seem to be very far below the previous capacity standard. Clearly, as the nuclear age was advancing in years, the required capacity for acquiring nuclear weapons was becoming smaller. Finally, in 1998, when Pakistan tested its first nuclear weapon, it demonstrated that nuclear weapons could be acquired by a state that was hardly an industrial power at all. The nuclear tests by North Korea in 2006 emphasized this new real-

ity, and if and when Iran develops its own nuclear weapons, that will underscore the point.

In the course of the first six decades of the nuclear age, advances in technology and, more importantly, in the ability to obtain technologies already developed by more advanced nations, have steadily lowered the threshold for acquiring nuclear weapons. Technological advances have driven the necessary capacity downward, successively from superpowers, to major powers, to minor powers.

Now, in the seventh decade of the nuclear age, the great fear is that we will soon see—perhaps with another big bang—the next step in this drive downward. Nuclear weapons will be acquired by an organization that is no power or state at all, a subnational but transnational terrorist network, such as al-Qaeda, which has already said that it is intent upon using nuclear weapons against America.

Not being a state, a sub- and transnational network does not possess territory or population for which it would be responsible—assets that it seeks to preserve and protect, which would be the targets of retaliatory attacks by other states. Thus sub- and transnational networks cannot be the objects of classical, state-against-state deterrence, a principal foundation of the international order (such as it is) that we have been living in ever since the advent of the nuclear age.

Moreover, one can imagine that technological advances will eventually drive the capacity threshold even lower, from the sub- and transnational network or group to its logical endpoint: just one or two persons by themselves. The long-predicted age of the “super-empowered individual” would at last have arrived.

At present, however, we are only in the midst of the downward transition to the sub- and transnational network. That is still enough to get our attention. Unless deterrence can be re-invented to fit transnational Islamist terrorist networks, we are about to witness the end of an epoch—and the end of many Americans as well.

The reality of the threat from transnational Islamist terrorist networks was clearly revealed on Sept. 11, 2001. But the potential for that threat to also become a nuclear one has been ticking away ever since Pakistan acquired nuclear weapons in 1998. Not only was the Pakistani bomb the first “Islamic bomb” (if not quite an Islamist one), but Pakistan acquired it with the aid of an extensive transnational nuclear network orchestrated by its chief nuclear scientist, A.Q. Khan. It became obvious that Islamists in Pakistan might use a similar transnational network to pass on Pakistani nuclear weapons to other Islamists elsewhere. In any event, other Muslim countries, most obviously Iraq and Iran, seemed to be good candidates to acquire the

next Islamic bomb and perhaps to pass it on.

Confronted with these ominous developments, this demonic dynamic that undermined and disoriented classical deterrence, the Bush administration chose to replace deterrence with preemption. This choice and the reasoning behind it were spelled out in September 2002 in the administration's National Security Strategy of the United States. In principle, the preemption strategy appeared reasonable, but when applied to Iraq, it required making two dubious arguments—Saddam Hussein was acquiring nuclear weapons, and he was also supporting al-Qaeda—and then constructing a dubious connection between them. One might have thought that the debacle of applying preemption to Iraq would have discredited the doctrine, but the Bush administration is now seeking to do much the same with Iran.

But the replacement of deterrence with preemption was premature. The full potential of deterrence had not been explored or exploited. Instead, it is possible to argue that classical deterrence—the deterrence of states—can

rence and redirect our approach downward from states to communities, be they ethnic groups, tribes, or clans.

In searching the Islamic world for places in which traditional deterrence can be effective against the threat of nuclear terrorism, the obvious place to look is strong states that can be held responsible for their own actions and for the actions of the people (including potential nuclear terrorists) who live within their territory. There are not many such strong states in the Islamic world. Rather, for reasons that seem to be intrinsic to Muslim societies, the normal pattern is authoritarian states that are brutal but also too weak to control all of their territory (e.g., Sudan, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan). Moreover, as the inevitable decay of any regime works its way, the weak state often becomes a failed one (e.g., Somalia, Pakistan as it seems to have now become). There is one very good example of the kind of state we are looking for, however: Iran.

When most Americans think of Iran, they think of a terrorist state, one that promotes transnational terrorist organizations such as Hezbollah and which,

munist insurgencies in Southeast Asia, the Iranian Islamist regime wants to preserve its state, its territory, its resources, its people, and above all itself, while at the same time promoting revolution abroad. But the goal of preservation takes priority over the goal of promotion. Since the Iranian regime has a great deal to protect, it has a great many assets that are hostages to U.S. retaliation. Thus it is a good candidate for classical deterrence.

Iran is also the major Shi'ite state. Indeed, it is the only Shi'ite power. Its territory of 636,000 square miles and its population of 61 million are immensely larger than any other Shi'ite state. This means not only that the Iranian regime has significant territory and population that it wants to preserve, but it is also the only substantial and sustained supporter of Shi'ite transnational terrorist networks. That is why virtually all Shi'ite terrorists are concentrated within Hezbollah, which Iran supports (and can control). This means that by deterring Iran, it is also possible in effect to deter Hezbollah.

Now if Iran were the only potential source of nuclear terrorism, it would certainly present a grave deterrence problem. After all, deterring the Soviet Union posed a very serious problem indeed, and deterring the Chinese Communist regime still does. However, the problem of deterring Islamist nuclear terrorism can be thought about in the old-fashioned, classical way. We would not be wrestling with what appears to be a new and intractable puzzle.

It is not the established regime holding many valuable assets but the transnational network holding few or none that poses this problem. The danger comes not from the strong state that can control its territory and population but from the failed or failing one that cannot. Here we see a major and important contrast between Shi'ite and

SINCE THE IRANIAN REGIME HAS A GREAT DEAL TO PROTECT, IT HAS MANY ASSETS THAT ARE HOSTAGES TO U.S. RETALIATION. THUS IT IS A GOOD CANDIDATE FOR CLASSICAL DETERRENCE.

still be used against one version of the Islamist terrorist threat: Shi'ite terrorism, which emanates from Iran. This is a simpler problem, and it largely can be addressed in the old-fashioned way.

The other version of the Islamist terrorist threat is Sunni terrorism, which emanates from transnational networks, particularly al-Qaeda and its affiliates. This is a complex problem, and to address it, we need to reinvent deter-

through its continuing nuclear enrichment program, is steadily laying the groundwork for obtaining nuclear weapons. Together, these two features will give Iran the capacity for nuclear terrorism.

Iran is certainly all of this, but it is also something more. Like the Soviet regime when it supported an international movement and like the Chinese Communist regime when it supported com-

Sunni Islamist terrorist networks. Since the Shi'ite networks are in large measure controlled by Iran, we can hold Iran responsible for their actions. Sunni networks, in contrast, are in large measure controlled by no strong state. Rather, they are supported either by substate and transnational actors operating within weak states (like the Wahabist foundations, tribes, and clans within Saudi Arabia) or by official units of the weak states (like the Inter-Services Intelligence agency of Pakistan). If the United States tries to apply the methods of classical deterrence against the Saudi state or the Pakistan state, it is applying pressure at the wrong point; it is like pushing on a wet noodle. By pressing on the weak state, the United States is pressing only indirectly on the actual source of the nuclear terrorist threat, and the pressure is dissipated within the political and bureaucratic miasma that is a failing government.

The obvious solution for the United States is instead to press directly on the actual source of the nuclear terrorist threat. This means descending from the higher but superficial and artificial level of the state down to the lower but substantive and real level of the substate organization, ethnic community, or even local tribe or clan. In other words, just as technological advances have driven nuclear acquisition capacity downward, so too and in response, we will have to drive nuclear deterrence strategy downward.

Consider a vertical dimension of deterrence, ranging from the national state at the top down through the successive levels of the ethnic community and the tribe to the clan at the bottom. At the same time, imagine a horizontal dimension, spanning the wide array of entities that conflict with each other on any particular level: Iran versus Saudi Arabia; Shi'ite community versus Sunni community; Sunni tribe versus another

Sunni tribe, and so on. It is the nature of societies composed of ethnic communities, tribes, or clans that on each of these levels there have been long standing conflicts.

Strategists are, of course, very familiar with state-versus-state conflicts. They are also well versed in the strategies of balance of power and divide and rule, by which one state or power preserves or advances its interests by playing different states against each other.

JUST AS TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCES HAVE DRIVEN **NUCLEAR ACQUISITION CAPACITY** DOWNWARD, SO TOO AND IN RESPONSE, WE WILL HAVE TO DRIVE **NUCLEAR DETERRENCE STRATEGY** DOWNWARD.

What is less well known is that historically powers have also used the same strategies at the lower levels of ethnic community, tribe, and clan. This approach was fundamental to the ways that the British and the French once ran their empires, particularly in the Islamic world. And although it is now virtually forgotten, such strategies were also fundamental to the way that the young United States in the 19th century dealt with the many conflicting Indian tribes (sometimes called "nations") on the Western frontier.

When we put the two dimensions together, we can see a sort of matrix in which we could, first, identify a particular entity that surrounds and supports either a terrorist group or a local node of a transnational terrorist network, and, second, locate the other entities that surround and conflict with the first entity. The most effective deterrence would be to zero in on the right point in the matrix and also on any adjacent points that can be mobilized against it.

Every Sunni terrorist network, no matter how transnational (like al-Qaeda and increasingly its franchises

and protégés), is embedded within a community of people who sustain and support it. Islamist terrorists, just like Mao's guerrillas, have to swim in a sea of people, and this is true of nuclear terrorists, too.

In the Islamic world, that community almost always has a self-conscious collective identity, with the members thinking of themselves first as a community and not as individuals. When Westerners gravitate toward groups, they define themselves within such weak or empty

"communities" as the "urban community," the "African-American community," or the "gay community."

But in the Islamic world, the collective community identity is often so strong as to be institutionalized by the pervasive practice of endogamous marriage. Indeed, in this kind of culture first cousins are often the preferred marriage partner.

This collective identity may exist only at the low level and narrow scope of the clan or the tribe, or it may be at the higher level and broader scope of the ethnic community. With respect to our problem of deterrence, the important level and scope are where the sanctuary and support of the Islamist terrorist network are found. It is here that we find the collective entity that should be held responsible for the actions of the terrorist network and should be the object of the full panoply of deterrence methods before an attack.

One of these methods, of course, is to directly threaten the entity with massive retaliation if a nuclear attack emanates from a terrorist network that it supports. Another and perhaps

better method is more indirect: to threaten the entity by supporting and empowering its surrounding and conflicting entities. These other players usually have ample historical reasons for engaging in their own conflicts if empowered to do so.

The place where most of these problems come together in a big and bad way is the wild frontier region between Afghanistan and Pakistan. Neither of the two states can control its part of this region, thus the area makes a good base for the archetypal transnational Islamist terrorist network that is al-Qaeda.

world. They are virtually the only ethnic community in Afghanistan that supports the Taliban. Indeed, almost everyone in the Taliban is a Pashtun. It was, of course, the Taliban regime, and therefore the Pashtun community, that hosted and protected al-Qaeda before the American invasion of Afghanistan in 2001. And it is the Pashtun community in the Northwest Frontier Province and Federally Administered Tribal Areas of Pakistan that gives al-Qaeda a haven there today.

Like many close-knit ethnic or tribal communities, the Pashtuns have an

Apache and Comanche tribes on their own Southwest frontier at that time.

The Bush administration committed a grave error in December 2001 and January 2002 when it did not pursue Osama bin Laden and Mullah Mohammed Omar until they were caught or killed or turned over by their Pashtun protectors to American officials. The administration correctly punished the Taliban for supporting and harboring bin Laden and al-Qaeda, at the level of the Afghan state. But it foolishly did not drive that punishment home, so the sanctuary and support merely migrated to the level of the Pashtun community and local Taliban tribes.

Had the Bush administration carried its retaliation to an effective and conclusive end, it would have achieved many good results. Among them would have been to lay a firm foundation upon which credible deterrence against Islamist terrorists could have been constructed for the future. For that grave act of omission, we have already paid a great price, and we are likely to pay a fortune in the future.

Because the Pashtuns at this new and lower level of community and tribes continue to shelter al-Qaeda, they would be a fitting target for retaliation if any new—or nuclear—attack occurs. This means that they would be a suitable object of deterrence policy today, before an attack.

Since the Pashtuns have been an ungovernable people, perhaps they should be assigned a territory where they can govern themselves and only themselves and no one else and where they can do so in their own Pashtunwali way. If that way includes learning how to construct a state that can be held responsible for the actions of itself and its people, that would be a good thing, and we can support it. If that way instead includes providing sanctuary and support for Islamist terrorists who

PERHAPS THE BEST WAY FOR AMERICANS TO THINK ABOUT THE **PASHTUN TRIBES** ON THE FRONTIER WOULD BE THE WAY **LATE-19TH-CENTURY AMERICANS THOUGHT ABOUT THE APACHE AND COMANCHE TRIBES** ON THEIR OWN SOUTHWEST FRONTIER.

The two parts of this frontier region are the southern and eastern provinces of Afghanistan and the neighboring Northwest Frontier Province and Federally Administered Tribal Areas of Pakistan. The inhabitants are overwhelmingly Pashtuns, and although these territories are formally divided between two (failing) states, they have historically formed one cultural region and, in the mind of the Pashtuns, one country—Pashtunistan.

When the British ruled India, they considered the Pashtuns (whom they called the Pathans) a notoriously unruly people—indeed, they called them “ungovernable.” And so the Pashtuns have remained, right down to the present day. We might now properly call them a rogue people.

The Pashtuns’ roguery has come at great cost to their neighboring ethnic communities: the Tajiks, the Uzbeks, the Hazaras, and the Punjabis. They are now also a rogue people to the rest of the

intense sense of communal identity and almost no sense of individuality. They also naturally have an intense awareness of the communal identity, even the collective guilt, of their enemies. It is impossible to deal with the Pashtuns as if they were individuals, responding to calculations of individual benefits and costs. This is why, after more than six years, no one has stepped forward to turn in Osama bin Laden or Mullah Muhammed Omar, the leader of the Taliban, even though the United States has offered a \$25-million reward for each. The Pashtun ethical code is “Pashtunwali,” their unique Pashtun way.

The only way to deal with the Pashtuns is the way they deal with themselves and everyone else, as a community, one that is capable of both collective honor and guilt. Perhaps the best way for Americans to think about the Pashtun tribes on the Northwest Frontier would be the way late-19th-century Americans thought about the

are bent on acquiring and using nuclear weapons, this will be a bad thing, and we can destroy it.

Of course, it may now be impossible for Americans—with their ideals of individualism, liberalism, and democracy at the very core of their identity—to deal directly with the Pashtuns in such a communal and collective-guilt way. There are, however, other ethnic communities in Afghanistan—the Tajiks, the Uzbeks, and the Hazaras—and even in Pakistan, who have long been dominated or abused by the Pashtuns and who would be willing to do so, if this were allowed by the United States and the other NATO countries now operating in Afghanistan. Of course, to allow the local and historical adversaries of the Pashtuns to deal with them in the local and historical way—and the way of the Pashtuns themselves—would be repugnant to conventional standards of human rights and universal justice. However, sometimes local but generally held conceptions of justice are more fitting to local realities than universal, general ones.

AN ISLAMIST PAKISTAN, WITH **AL-QAEDA OPERATING ON ITS TERRITORY**, WOULD PROBABLY BE THE **MOST DANGEROUS STATE IN THE WORLD**, A ROGUE STATE IN THE FULLEST SENSE OF THE TERM.

The Pakistani state has always been artificial and brittle. It was created, as both West Pakistan and East Pakistan, in one bloody partition in 1947, and was recreated in reduced form, as West Pakistan alone, in a second partition in 1973. The United States has long tried to make Pakistan into a strong state, and the Bush administration is still trying. The administration's efforts, however, are obviously failing, and the Pakistani state is failing, too. Even at its

strongest, the Pakistani state has never been able to effectively govern the Federally Administered Tribal Areas, which everyone, including successive Pakistani governments, has officially recognized as "autonomous." That is to say, the local, largely Pashtun tribes have pretty much been able to do as they please—and these tribes have been pleased to provide support for al-Qaeda and the Taliban, so much so that they have now spread out and are conducting terrorist attacks in the rest of Pakistan.

There is a reason behind the weakness, a method to the madness, of the Pakistani state with respect to the Pashtun Tribal Areas. Although almost no one in the U.S. foreign-policy establishment talks about it, the cause can be clearly seen with a look at the map. The strategic center of the rather large country that is Pakistan consists of a rather small area in the northern Punjab and is composed of the major cities of Islamabad (the capital), Rawalpindi, and Lahore. Lahore is only about 20 miles from the frontier with India, and the Islamabad and Rawalpindi border

on the Northwest Frontier Province and are only about 50 miles from the border of the Tribal Areas [CHECK]. Moreover, this entire strategic core is only about 150 miles in width.

This means that there has long been an obvious strategy for the Indian military to pursue, if it should ever want to destroy Pakistan, and that is a massive military thrust across the strategic core. An obvious response for the Pakistan military is to seek strategic depth to its

rear—and to the west—and that means in the Tribal Areas of Pakistan and even, since it could become essential in the event of an Indian invasion, in the Pashtun area of Afghanistan. Such a strategic rear requires a friendly local host population—the Pashtuns. This is why the Pakistani military, and its powerful Inter-Services Intelligence agency, has long insisted upon close and co-operative relations with the Pashtuns, be they in Pakistan or Afghanistan and no matter how dangerous they might be to everyone else. This strategic link between the Pakistani military and the Pashtun community is the fatal flaw, the toxic dump, of Pakistan as it relates to the rest of the world. Very likely, it could continue to emanate toxins—and terrorism—until Pakistan as a state is broken and dissolved.

Moreover, with a strong Islamist presence in the country and even in the military, Pakistan could one day become an Islamist state, one already possessing nuclear weapons. An Islamist Pakistan, with al-Qaeda operating on its territory, would probably be the most dangerous state in the world, a rogue state in the fullest sense of the term. If the United States should ever determine that this state had to be put to an end, India would obviously be the best one to do it, to "crack the Paks" and bring about a third partition of Pakistan.

In the ruins of this artificial country would be four or five separate ethnic states or provinces—most likely, the Punjab, Sindh, Baluchistan, and, if the Pashtuns should prove themselves capable of rising to the level of a state, Pashtunistan. Each could be reconstructed and ordered by the Indian Raj, with a mixture of direct and indirect rule not unlike the British Raj, which once ruled these very same provinces. And at long last, this artificial state with its wild regions and fatal flaws would be replaced with a strong state that could

be held responsible for the Islamists under its rule and that would have every incentive to exercise this responsibility.

The essential U.S. strategic objective in the Islamic world should be the establishment of strong, responsible states that we can hold responsible for their own actions and for the actions of the Islamists who live within them.

The logic of this analysis leads to what many people—at least neoconservatives—will consider a perverse conclusion. We consider it to be more a discerning, if paradoxical, one.

A good example of such a state is Iran. When the United States is dealing with this troublesome country, the worst thing it could do would be to destroy the Iranian state totally so that Hezbollah and other Shi'ite terrorist networks would have no state to control them. They would become unguided missiles or loose cannons, careening around the Middle East and even the globe.

In regard to transnational Sunni terrorist networks, however, we do not now have any obvious candidates for strong, responsible states that can control them. Unless or until these are established, deterrence will have to point in a different direction.

For deterrence to survive in the new nuclear age—the age defined by Sunni Islamist terrorism—it must become focused upon ethnic communities. American strategists will have to learn about the features of specific communities and even tribes, just as they learned about specific states and nations in the old nuclear age. And if deterrence does not survive in this new age, neither will we. ■

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In Search of Dear Leader

The problem with partisanship: not enough of it

By Dennis Dale

IT IS A CLICHÉ that the masses crave a strong leader. It is also demonstrably true. It is also true that the political class covets the uncomplicated efficacy of dictatorial rule. This impatience with republican limits can only resolve itself in disdain for the wisdom, and defiance of the will of the people. For the ambitious political leader, the population is the problem for which a unifying monarch or council of oligarchs is the answer.

This impulse recognizes no ideology, drawing many to the same remedy for the frustration of disparate designs. The priesthood of today's prevailing order, mainstream media pundits, share this sentiment, often demonstrating it with unintentional comedy. Witness Chris Matthews' serial exaltation of the masculine virtues of John McCain.

There is even a distinctly modern American, pop-celebrity version that imagines a benign leader who will unite us in defiance of our most elemental divisions by power of personality, liberal severity, or mere demographic circumstance. Acolytes sometimes use the familiar totalitarian method of simultaneously deifying and sentimentalizing the chosen by denoting them with the familiar forename; witness Hillary and Rudy (or for that matter, Oprah). This device is not available to all; the inelegant Barack doesn't carry the same

musical, open-ended vowel structure (or the soft consonant ending of, say, Saddam).

Andrew Sullivan's boundless faith in the power of Senator Obama's comforting non-Caucasian visage to absolve our sins in the eyes of the world and deliver it finally to the faith that is Americanism is one genre of the art of the benign despot. Matthews's affected regular-guy, war-hero fascination is another.

This natural enemy of republican government didn't escape the attention of the founding fathers, and many of those arguing for the necessity of a vigorous chief executive reassured us that the office envisioned by the Constitution would not become the imperial presidency we have made of it. Among their calculations was that legislators' jealousy of their own power would naturally create resistance to executive overreach, rescuing us from a precarious dependence on ethical discipline. Alas.

Needless to say, this has not happened, and the creeping expansion of power concentrated in the executive branch has become a rout in the frenzied, post-9/11 atmosphere. Congress has abnegated all authority over war, first by passing an open authorization for the president to invade a nation halfway around the world and powerless to threaten us, then by surrendering the power of the purse and funding the ensuing occupation at each turn—long

after its pretext was revealed. While consequences for the nation and the world still unfold catastrophically, any consequences for those responsible have been thwarted, through the same perverse state of comity between executive and legislature that allowed it.

The power of the presidency now compounds itself; one party wields this power while the other covets it. The spectacle of Democratic legislative impotence is a direct result of presidential aspirations. Through it all, a distinct faction and particular worldview at odds with the valid interests of the nation have carried the day with remarkable efficiency. Corrupt though it may be, our government cannot be said to be divided or lacking in vigor. Yet divisions there are—between popular and elite will, between the law and government action, between legitimate national interest and current foreign policy.

Of the two defining initiatives of the Bush administration, the war and immigration reform, the government has showed a unity that authoritarian regimes acting in camera sometimes struggle to achieve.

In the case of the war, a bizarre pattern of official subterfuge giving way to exposure and failure giving way to further subterfuge has unfolded. Pretext gains public support for the war until pretext is exposed and the war goes badly, turning public opinion. Consequences of failure then become the pretext for remaining in the war, with the “surge” and attendant ethnic cleansing creating the plausibility of a narrative of success, which relieves public opposition. It no longer matters that this “success” bears no relation to the original purposes given for the war. This absurdity renders us as a people complicit through a lack of diligence in the criminal behavior of our government. Nonetheless, in each phase the people have either been misled or defied.

The common feature through all of this has been a remarkable level of unity between the political parties, notwithstanding the belated and stillborn Democratic opposition to the war that was the public’s paltry payout for returning them to power. “Bipartisanship” has never been more in evidence.

Now into the breach of public and international confidence comes a group of 16 retired politicians and one lame-duck senator identifying partisanship as the culprit and dictating that their erstwhile colleagues present them with their plan to forge a “government of national unity.” If denied, they promise to challenge them for power with their very own Augustus, who wears upon his brow the noblest wreath of our time, massive wealth: New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg. After two days meeting in private, the congregants of the Bipartisan Forum emerged with a short statement, demanding that all presidential candidates commit to apportioning a certain amount of cabinet positions to the opposition party. No constitutional or customary basis, much less authority, for delivering such an ultimatum was offered.

The assembly was dampened by Obama’s victory in Iowa. Mayor Bloomberg’s alarm at partisan gridlock seems to inversely track his viability as a presidential candidate, which consultants have decided is more degraded by Obama’s vague promises of transformation than it is by Hillary Clinton’s claim of perpetual change; likewise John McCain’s crossover appeal to Democrats soothes the mayor’s outrage.

One might conclude from Bloomberg’s putsch that he opposes the policies of President Bush. Finding particular points of departure is difficult, however. The mayor supports the Patriot Act and the war on terror as envisioned by the Bush administration, and enthusiastically supported the war in

Iraq. This isn’t political opportunism or post-9/11 hysteria that might presage a conversion to realism. The mayor has staunchly supported foreign policy that views Israel’s security as inseparable from America’s.

On the other signature issue of the Bush administration, immigration, Bloomberg just as neatly tracks the president. It is a failure in execution and competence that the mayor bemoans. That this failure is in no way attributable to partisanship but to public opposition, which Bloomberg denounces as xenophobia, contradicts his vague but energetic protestations of a lack of “unity” and “civility” between political parties. Still his enthusiasm for illegal immigration does not hamper his support for the institution of a DNA or fingerprint database, ostensibly to track and verify all U.S. workers. Any possible erosions of citizens’ liberty do not trouble the mayor, while any actual regulation of immigration does.

The intellectual and moral inadequacy of President Bush, uniquely empowered, has been disastrous. Still, the Bloomberg effort suggests that our elites do not see the outsized power of the presidency and the direction of its policies as problems requiring any remedy other than the installation of a more capable sovereign.

Perhaps they truly believe that our problems are the direct result of “partisanship.” Certainly they’re confident of their ability to do better. But whether they understand or not, what the elite laments is not divided government but a government limited in its powers. They lament democracy. It’s remarkable, but apparently the longer one serves in a Republic, the more one comes to resent it. ■

Dennis Dale’s blog, Untethered, can be found at www.dennisdale.blogspot.com.

Grand Old Party

High spirits and low expectations at CPAC

By Michael Brendan Dougherty

AT LAST YEAR'S Conservative Political Action Conference, a man in a dolphin suit stood outside the Omni Shoreham Hotel mocking Mitt Romney's flip-flopping on abortion, the Reagan presidency, and other issues dear to conservative hearts. Attendees loved him. This year, Flipper stood by himself in a hallway, his dorsal fin drooping, his plush head hanging—a year's worth of wear and tear. With John McCain on the verge of winning the Republican nomination, few of the conservatives at CPAC wanted to joke about Romney, in whom they had of late placed their hopes. And within a few hours of the start of the conference, both Romney and Flipper would need to find new lines of work.

The former Massachusetts governor was introduced by Laura Ingraham, who, clueless of the drama to come, waxed on about Romney as the "conservative's conservative" while enthusiastic supporters waved foam "Mitts." With trademark efficiency, he delivered a speech that served red meat with the regularity and forced sincerity of a Denny's waitress. On welfare and regulation, Romney said, "Dependency is culture killing." On family, he declared that the development of a child is "enhanced" by having a mother and father. "I wonder how it is that unelected judges, like some in my state of Massachusetts, are so unaware of this reality," he mused.

He compared his run against McCain to Reagan's campaign against the moderate Ford, but then declared that one issue trumped everything, even his own presidential ambitions: "There is an important

difference from 1976. Today we are a nation at war." He explained that by fighting on to the convention, he would "forestall the launch of a national campaign and, frankly, I'd make it easier for Senator Clinton or Obama to win. ... I simply cannot let my campaign be a part of aiding a surrender to terror." As disappointed fans filed out, organizers hauled out the campaign debris. Exit Romney faithful, enter McCainiacs. The transition took mere minutes.

Well aware that CPAC wasn't a natural constituency, McCain's campaign had loaded a double-barreled introduction: former Virginia senator George Allen, who but for three unfortunate syllables might have been in McCain's place, and Tom Coburn, arguably the Senate's most conservative member.

His credentials polished, McCain entered to orchestrated applause—the string of speakers preceding him had urged the crowd to mind its manners—and struck as conciliatory a tone as an old maverick can muster. "Many of you have disagreed strongly with some positions I have taken in recent years," he said. "I understand that. ... And it is my sincere hope that even if you believe I have occasionally erred in my reasoning as a fellow conservative, you will still allow that I have, in many ways important to all of us, maintained the record of a conservative."

The reaction was mixed. The author of last year's wildly unpopular "comprehensive immigration reform" was roundly booed when he broached the subject of America's borders. But he knew how to win the audience back: "Whomever the Democrats nominate,

they would govern this country in a way that will, in my opinion, take this country backward to the days when government felt empowered to take from us our freedom to decide for ourselves the course and quality of our lives." (Within the same paragraph, McCain inadvertently demonstrated the contradictions between the old Republican palaver about freedom and the demands of the war on terror saying, "It is shameful and dangerous that Senate Democrats are blocking an extension of surveillance powers." No line got louder applause.)

McCain may not have sealed the deal, but he got his foot in the door. Blogging for *National Review*, Stanley Kurtz wrote, "I thought McCain did an excellent job ... he won over most of the crowd."

While the establishment was upstairs coalescing around its unlikely champion, the full spectrum of the conservative grassroots was on display in the downstairs exhibition hall. Where else to buy an "I'd rather be water-boarded than vote for McCain" t-shirt? Other conservative couture featured a picture of a bricklayer constructing a wall: "If you build it, they won't come." (One wonders what the Hondurans who make these shirts think of the Americans who buy them.) A generation after the Berlin Wall fell, red-baiting is still in vogue: one activist sold t-shirts with the figure of Vladimir Lenin bestriding an American university; another offered bottles of Lenin-ade and ushankas with hammer and sickle insignia and Clinton or Obama's name.

Wandering among the dealers, Max Blumenthal greeted me. Son of former Clinton aide Sidney Blumenthal, Max

writes for *The Nation* and produces video exposés of the Right. He looked over his shoulder at the young Republican women standing around and asked, “Shouldn’t they be dressed more modestly?” I laughed and said that the conservative movement doesn’t come from Amish country. Max offered his opinion of the way liberal women dress (not all that great) and pressed on about the short skirts and plunging necklines around us. By then, I wanted to get away. “I guess they are dressed for breeding,” I quipped—then immediately worried that he was videotaping me. That would never sound right. But Max had hit on something odd about CPAC.

Six feet from us hung a t-shirt that read “I only sleep with Republicans,” and two booths away Young Americans for Freedom featured an airbrushed poster of Ann Coulter in her best come-hither pose. The Young Britons’ Foundation didn’t have any Edmund Burke tracts, but they did have a poster of a sultry brunette, her lips parted slightly. The lascivious caption: “Life is better under a conservative.” Not to be outdone, banners at the Clare Booth Luce Policy Institute’s booth encouraged each young woman walking by to become “A Luce Lady.” CPAC’s many parties would provide ample opportunity.

The first night, a *Washington Times* editor rented a room and spread the word that he had \$1,500 worth of booze. The party was loud, and just a few moments after former congressman Bob Barr, leader of the House’s effort to impeach Bill Clinton, posed for a picture with his arms draped over two young women, the hotel shut down the festivities. The consensus opinion of the party: “Off the hook.”

The Maine College Republicans boasted on Facebook of their annual binge: “In just five years Mainefest has grown from a small hotel gathering to become one of Washington’s most

The increasingly unstable situation in Pakistan is now the principal topic at meetings of the National Security Council. There is apprehension that the Pakistani nuclear arsenal is vulnerable, a concern that the Indian government has shared privately with Washington. President Pervez Musharraf insists that the nuclear weapons are safe and that the only way militants could gain access to the devices would be if al-Qaeda or the Taliban “defeated the Pakistani army entirely” or if extremist religious groups won parliamentary elections. The Pentagon has been instructed by President Bush to develop a detailed operational plan for seizing Pakistan’s nuclear facilities should they fall into the hands of Islamic extremists.

A NSC proposal made at the end of 2007 to dispatch joint CIA/Special Forces into the Northwest territories to expand the search for al-Qaeda’s cadre and Osama bin Laden has been rejected by President Musharraf, who refuses to grant permission for American hot pursuit in border areas or even the establishment of passive U.S.-manned listening posts to identify terrorist concentrations. American intelligence has identified terrorist movements in both North and South Waziristan, the tribal regions where bin Laden and his deputy Ayman al-Zawahiri are believed to be located, but the information has not been acted on because of difficulties in coordinating with the Pakistanis. During his most recent meetings with CIA Director Michael Hayden, Musharraf firmly stated his objection to having a CIA ground presence along the frontier, but said he would accept additional military training of his troops to improve their counterinsurgency capability. In other words, he would accept money and technology but no U.S. operational presence.

Musharraf, who has repeatedly denied that bin Laden is even in Pakistan, has committed large numbers of Pakistani army troops to the federally administered but *de facto* autonomous border region. He has focused on confronting Pakistani Taliban elements as well as rogue tribal leaders such as Baitullah Mehsud, who has challenged the Pakistani military directly by taking over several military bases and capturing several hundred frontier troops, sometimes beheading his captives to set an example. Musharraf has told U.S. intelligence officials privately that he is not focused on countering al-Qaeda because it is more of a threat inside Afghanistan and that the Pakistani fundamentalists and their tribal supporters are his major concern. But his weakness is revealed by the government’s inability to militarily confront and remove Mehsud, who was apparently involved in the Bhutto assassination and is closely linked to al-Qaeda. Musharraf’s position has frustrated senior U.S. officials who observe that the tribesmen and al-Qaeda are often allied, that the Pakistani military is inefficient and in some cases incompetent, and that the Musharraf policy is inexorably losing what little control the central government has along the frontier. The consequence is that both al-Qaeda and the Taliban continue to grow stronger. The Afghan Taliban are known to be preparing a major offensive against the Hamid Karzai government in Kabul in the spring, and the threat to Musharraf’s rule continues to grow.

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highly anticipated social events of the year.” It’s not quite the Gridiron Dinner, but the parties seem to please the attendees. Washington’s free-market think tanks and lobbying outfits suffer from a lack of females, and college Republican groups contain a surfeit of attractive women looking for America’s future lawyers. Besides, the men in college Republican groups are unavailable and undesirable—their romantic attention entirely fixed on Ayn Rand.

Not everyone came for the parties. Outside the main ballroom, angry CPACers waved “Republicans Against McCain” protest signs. Another cluster held up a “McCain = Amnesty” banner. Libertarian activists claimed that registrations at their booth spiked as soon as Romney announced the suspension of his campaign.

Ron Paul, under whose standard most dissenters rallied, gave one of the sharpest speeches of his campaign. The only featured speaker to attack John McCain, Paul asked the audience to consider that the presumptive nominee had allied with Tom Daschle on tax policy, with Russ Feingold on campaign finance, with Al Gore on global warming, and with Ted Kennedy on immigration. He did not shy away from his differences with the movement on the war on terror: “Osama bin Laden loves our foreign policy.” Donald Devine, second vice chairman of The American Conservative Union, moved slowly to the back of the room, asking if the people there supported Paul. With a sigh, he admitted that he, too, would probably vote for him. It was a stunning admission from one of CPAC’s founders.

But the organizers know better than to let their conference devolve into dissent. Newt Gingrich was called in as the closer. His speech contained his familiar chorus of absurd statistics: “85 percent of American people believe we have an obligation to protect America and her allies, 75 percent believe we have obligation to defeat our enemies.” Apparently Democrats

believe that America’s enemies should pillage Kansas City next week.

At one moment Gingrich seemed to echo the dissident voices heard in break-away sessions: it is essential for “the conservative movement ... to declare itself independent from the Republican Party.” But that doesn’t mean starting a new party or even sitting out an election. Gingrich continued, “Any reasonable conservative will—in the end—find they have an absolute requirement to support the Republican nominee for president this fall.” Apparently political independence from Republicans still implies an absolute requirement to vote for them.

Gingrich was acting according to the logic of CPAC. Founded to pull the country and the Republican Party to the right, the conference is now so well established and so reliant on the appearance of big-name politicians for its success (measured in number of attendees and media buzz) that it has become the place where conservatives reconcile themselves to voting Republican no matter what. Tempted though they may be to punish the GOP for its transgressions, each year Raymond Aron’s dictum prevails: “In politics, the choice is not between good and evil, but between the preferable and the detestable.” Of course this gives incredible license to “the preferable” to act detestably. If a movement believes that its opponents are the communist caricatures depicted on CPAC t-shirts, it can convince itself to throw in with McCain. By the end of Gingrich’s speech, morale had been lifted and attendees had their bags stuffed with all the trinkets they could carry.

The bullying bumper stickers, the man in the dolphin outfit, and the best-sellers by radio personalities are all the result of conservatives turning toward movement politics. It is tempting to sniff at the CPAC crowd—many of whom claim to be conservatives but cannot tell

the difference between Russell Kirk and Captain Kirk. But that would be wrong.

Moving from ideas to policy advocacy and finally to governance requires building an electoral coalition that will, by its very nature, simplify subtle reflections into campaign slogans. When William F. Buckley tied himself, and by extension *National Review*, to the cause of Joe McCarthy, the conservative intellectual movement was married to a populist base. In his 1992 Republican convention speech, Pat Buchanan spoke of a great class of voters: “They don’t read Adam Smith or Edmund Burke, but they came from the same schoolyards and playgrounds and towns as we did. They share our beliefs and convictions, our hopes and our dreams. They are the conservatives of the heart.” Many of them are now at CPAC—and that’s part of the problem.

The conference flattens the political passions of these conservatives, channeling their energy into national politics and away from local concerns. Thus the range of activism narrows to immigration, foreign policy, and the solipsistic goal of sustaining the conservative movement itself. This is good for keeping Beltway institutions well funded but bad for the actual work of conservatism.

As the Omni Shoreham’s staff disassembled the exhibit hall, the young Republicans repaired to Capitol Hill for the last party of the weekend, Reaganpalooza, where organizers urged everyone to “Drink one for the Gipper.” A handful of anti-McCainiacs ordered stiff shots and argued over whether they could vote Republican in the fall. “It’s an anti-Obama vote, that’s all,” one offered. “But on immigration, McCain is against us. And on the war he’s against public opinion,” said another. But soon enough they swallowed their doubts and began dancing to the music, determined to celebrate a president who left office before some of them were born. The band never stopped playing on the Titanic either. ■

Bridge to Nowhere

When John F. Kennedy ran for president in 1960, he talked of a new generation of Americans taking charge, of heading out bravely for a New Frontier. He did not

call up the shades of FDR or Harry Truman or go back 45 years to Woodrow Wilson.

The same was true of Ronald Reagan in 1980. He offered a vision of a grand future where America would become again, after the malaise of the Carter era, a “shining city on a hill.” There was no hearkening back by Reagan to the great days of Ike.

Whatever their flaws and failings, both were charismatic and inspirational leaders, looking ahead in anticipation of heroic battles to be won and great deeds to be done. Yet in both parties today, the presidential candidates seem to feel a need to identify with and connect themselves to what are now the legendary leaders and causes of yesteryear.

For Democrats, it is JFK and Robert Kennedy. For Republicans, it is Reagan, which must frost the Bushes, who, between them, will have served four years longer than the Gipper, who departed almost 20 years ago.

For George H.W. Bush, it must be especially galling. For he presided over the fall of the Berlin Wall, the unification of Germany, the collapse of the Soviet Empire, the breakup of the Soviet Union, the first Gulf War and the liberation of Kuwait. Epochal events.

And, clearly, Bill Clinton was more than a little upset to hear Barack Obama talk of the Republican Party of the '90s as the party of ideas and of Reagan as a transformational figure—unlike Bill Clinton. Indeed, it says something about the Democratic Party today that to reach its heroes—JFK, RFK, Dr. King—

it must go back 40 years and pass over three presidents, Clinton, Carter, and LBJ, who served 17 years. And Robert Kennedy never even made it and was a presidential candidate for less than three months.

This invocation of the ghosts of the past seems to testify to a sense of inadequacy on the part of today's candidates, a need to reconnect to the party base, to insert themselves in a great tradition—rather than establish a new, separate identity—and to a belief that the years since Reagan have not been times of greatness in America.

Since our victory in the Cold War, we seem not to have lived in heroic times. After all, invading Panama and Haiti, bombing Serbia, and crushing Saddam twice is not quite the same as taking the measure of the Evil Empire or prevailing in the Cuban missile crisis.

As for the war against “Islamofascism,” it pales beside the war against the real fascists of the 20th century: the Japanese Empire and Hitler's Reich, which, in two years, conquered Europe from the Atlantic to the Urals. Mahmoud Ahmadinejad hosting David Duke at a Holocaust conference doesn't quite cut it.

For Democrats the problem seems most acute. After all, JFK has been dead 44 years. No one under 50 has any memory of his presidency. While his daughter has grown up to be a lovely woman, how many young people even know who Caroline Kennedy Schlossberg is? And other than his assassination that terrible day in Dallas and the Cuban missile crisis, which they learned about

in school, what do the people of America under 50 even know about JFK? There was the Bay of Pigs, the space program, and Jackie and her glamour. The film clips of JFK standing before the Berlin Wall declaring “Ich bin ein Berliner” are often shown, but few commentators mention that the wall went up on JFK's watch and he did zip about it. And since JFK, we have had LBJ, the Great Society, Vietnam, Nixon and China, Watergate, the Ford-Carter interlude, the Reagan era and two decades of Bush-Clinton-Bush.

Alone among the candidates, Obama seems to want to become a leader in the JFK-Reagan mold. His problem: he has no great cause like the Cold War or civil rights revolution and no great adversary as a foil.

Universal health care may be important. It is also a crashing bore, as that wonkish Democratic debate demonstrated. And didn't LBJ already do the heavy lifting on Medicare, Medicaid, and civil rights?

Democrats' problem is that they are the party of government, when, after Katrina, no one really believes in government anymore, except perhaps the military.

John McCain, now identifying himself as a “foot soldier in the Reagan revolution” is casting himself in a heroic posture as a Churchill who will “never surrender” and lead us to victory in the war against Islamofascism. But the American people now believe the war in Iraq was a mistake and want out, if only we can avoid a defeat or a bloody debacle.

Perhaps the candidates are hearkening back to yesterday because they know the American people are unhappy with today, and Barack's followers aside, are not looking forward to tomorrow with any anticipation of great days ahead under either party. ■

Mitt's Meltdown

The checklist conservative and his \$35-million haircut

By W. James Antle III

MITT ROMNEY ended his presidential campaign the same way it began: with a concerted effort to convince movement conservatives that he is one of them. After an introduction by talk-show host Laura Ingraham that likened Romney to Ronald Reagan, the former Massachusetts governor delivered a speech to the Conservative Political Action Conference that was filled with crowd pleasers from the Right's greatest hits. "As I said to you last year," Romney began, "conservative principles are needed now more than ever." Within a few paragraphs, he dropped out of the race.

Despite the audience's displeasure with the news, Romney's three-year sales pitch to conservative Republican voters was largely a failure. He was able to win over the institutions and activists of the conservative establishment, claiming the endorsements of *National Review*, *Human Events*, and the chairman of the American Conservative Union. Radio talk-show hosts like Ingraham, Sean Hannity, Mark Levin, and Rush Limbaugh turned to Romney as the candidate who could stop John McCain. Even as an ex-candidate, Romney edged out McCain in the CPAC straw poll: had he remained in the race, he probably would have won by a decisive margin.

Rank-and-file conservative Republicans reached a different verdict, however. In the Northeast and the West, exit polls showed the former Massachusetts governor winning such voters by margins less impressive than McCain's performance among moderates and independents. Conservatives in the South

rejected Romney for McCain and Mike Huckabee. Romney never closed the sale with evangelicals, the GOP's largest single voting bloc, a failure that led to his defeat in the Iowa caucuses and left his early-state strategy in tatters.

What went wrong? Although polls showed some discomfort with Romney's religion, the "Mormon problem" wasn't his biggest liability. Romney faced a larger Massachusetts problem. Republican primary voters found it difficult to believe that anything good could come from Boston, the home of Ted Kennedy, Michael Dukakis, and John Kerry. More damagingly, the positions Romney took in order to get elected in Massachusetts left him ill suited to run as the Republican field's most consistent conservative.

But the "Bain way" left Romney no choice. A one-term moderate governor of Massachusetts, whose record of accomplishment in office was decent but hardly stellar, would go nowhere in the GOP presidential race. Nor did it take much number-crunching to determine that conservatives were an underserved market in 2008. According to the early polls, the frontrunners were Rudy Giuliani, a pro-choice supporter of gay unions and gun control, and McCain, an opponent of the Bush tax cuts and the Senate's leading booster of amnesty for illegal immigrants. When the 2006 congressional elections knocked George Allen out of the race, the conservative vacuum became larger—and cried out for Romney to fill it.

The problem remained that after two statewide campaigns in Massachusetts,

Romney actually possessed thinner conservative credentials than McCain. In his 1994 Senate race against Kennedy, Romney pointed out that he had been a registered independent during the Reagan-Bush years. "I'm not trying to return to Reagan-Bush," he insisted during one debate. He favored lifting the ban on open homosexuals in the military and promised to be an even bigger proponent of "full equality for America's gay and lesbian citizens" than Kennedy.

As governor, Romney seemed less than enthusiastic about the 2003 Bush tax cuts on capital gains and dividends. He expressed openness to McCain-Kennedy on immigration and McCain-Feingold on campaign finance reform. Romney also supported a ban on assault weapons and was generally to McCain's left on gun control. And, of course, he was also pro-choice on abortion.

Romney's approach to dealing with these deficits of conservatism was three-fold. First, as governor of Massachusetts, he picked fights on issues like same-sex marriage and embryonic stem-cell research, siding with social conservatives against the liberal editorialists of the *Boston Globe*. Second, he abandoned his previous positions across the board and began to move right. Finally, he aggressively sold himself to Beltway conservatives and tried to introduce himself to the Republican primary electorate through a fawning national conservative press.

In presentations and one-on-one meetings, Romney is organized, persuasive, and impressive. He used these skills to great advantage as he met with

conservative leaders and tried to convince them of his bona fides. By 2006, Romney's white teeth and well-groomed hair had graced the cover of virtually every magazine of the mainstream Right. *National Review* dubbed him "Matinee Mitt," the *Weekly Standard* asked if 2008 was "Mormon in America," and *The American Spectator* proclaimed simply "Romney rocks!" A common theme in these cover stories was that Romney was a principled conservative fighting behind enemy lines—and someone who would make a strong presidential candidate.

These pieces also allowed Romney to road test arguments he would employ to make his flip-flops appear less dramatic. He de-emphasized the role fee increases—which to some looked suspiciously like tax hikes—played in his Massachusetts budget-balancing. He also began to redefine his pro-choice stance during the 2002 gubernatorial race as support for a "moratorium" on changing the commonwealth's existing abortion laws. That way, Romney would be able to spin his past advocacy of legal abortion as simply abiding by the will of the people rather than indicative of his personal views.

Nevertheless, it was the abortion issue more than any other that demonstrated how implausible Romney's re-invention really was. In the first YouTube election, Romney couldn't conceal his more liberal positions behind reams of favorable press. Conservative primary voters could see for themselves Romney's recent and emphatic defenses of *Roe v. Wade*.

Far from being a reluctant pro-choicer, as recently as the last five years Romney vowed to "respect and protect a woman's right to choose." In the spring of 2002, he told Planned Parenthood—an organization to which his wife gave money—that he favored both *Roe* and state taxpayer funding of abortion. Romney actively solicited an endorse-

ment by the Republican Majority for Choice and reportedly told executives at NARAL Pro-Choice America, "You need people like me in Washington."

Although Romney touted his 1994 endorsement by Massachusetts Citizens for Life as a presidential candidate, he ran away from it during the 2002 gubernatorial campaign. In a debate with his Democratic opponent Shannon O'Brien, Romney testily maintained, "I didn't seek [the pro-life group's endorsement], I didn't ask for it ... I did not in any way acknowledge their endorsement."

Such caginess about abortion was nothing new. Shortly after the pro-life group endorsed Romney, the candidate modified or reversed most of the positions that made him preferable to Ted Kennedy. "[Kennedy] was pro-life before *Roe v. Wade* and now he's changed," Romney adviser Charles Manning told the *Boston Globe* at the time. "Mitt has always been consistent in his pro-choice position and that's why the group respects him."

In 1994, Romney claimed that he became pro-choice over 20 years before when a family friend died because of an illegal abortion. A decade later, he said he changed his mind on the issue after hearing a doctor use the word "kill" in describing embryonic stem-cell research, wording the doctor disputes. Romney finally announced he was officially pro-life in a 2005 *Boston Globe* op-ed after vetoing an emergency contraception bill passed by the state legislature.

Romney's gymnastics—and the lengths to which his conservative admirers, such as Hugh Hewitt and Dean Barnett, went to defend them—didn't just insult pro-lifers' intelligence. The flip-flopping also irritated his opponents. When Sam Brownback questioned Romney's abortion position in a debate, Romney fired back, "I get tired of people that are holier than thou because they've been pro-life longer than I have." That

didn't stop Romney's conservative outreach coordinator from attacking McCain's pro-life record: "Ask the pro-life movement where [McCain's] leadership has been in the last six years since 2000 that he's been running for president." Unlike McCain, Romney was publicly pro-choice for five of those six years.

By the spring of 2007, conservative elites began entertaining second thoughts about their man, Mitt. Romney's appearance at the National Review Institute's Conservative Summit was panned even by pro-Romney pundits Rich Lowry and Kathryn Jean Lopez. An article critical of Romney's abortion record appeared in the *Weekly Standard*. Disenchantment with Romney delayed his coronation as the Right's preferred 2008 candidate and spawned movements to draft Newt Gingrich and Fred Thompson.

Yet Romney persevered, focusing on Iowa and New Hampshire. He hoped that winning the first two Republican contests would give him momentum going into Super Tuesday and beyond, allowing him to recover from his single-digit standing in most national polls. Gingrich failed to jump in, both Thompson and Giuliani faded. Faced with the prospects of a McCain nomination, Beltway conservatives coalesced around Romney.

Then along came Mike Huckabee. Underfunded, disorganized, and insufficiently conservative on economic issues for groups like the anti-tax Club for Growth, Huckabee offered Iowa's evangelicals the authenticity and trustworthiness that Romney so conspicuously lacked.

As Huckabee gained in the polls, the 2008 GOP race began to resemble the party's 1996 nominating contest. Conservative columnists, magazine scribes, and think tankers pilloried Huckabee for his supposed heterodoxies in much the same way as they once went after Pat Buchanan. Romney reprised the role

of Phil Gramm, a candidate with a substantial amount of money, a solid organization, and a lot of institutional support but less standing with grassroots Christian conservatives.

Unlike Gramm, however, Romney was versatile enough to survive an unsatisfactory performance in Iowa, followed by a devastating loss to McCain in New Hampshire. As late as Super Tuesday, Romney was telling revelers in Boston that he planned to stay in the race—and looked forward to the results in California.

It wasn't meant to be. Although the loss no doubt came as a disappointment to Romney, it was an even bigger defeat for organized conservatism. Romney's suspension of his campaign left McCain the likely nominee and Huckabee the last man with even a remote chance of derailing the Straight Talk Express—the two candidates movement conservatives liked the least.

Newspapers are stuffed with op-eds proclaiming that Romney's defeat indicates the waning power of movement conservatives and the talk-radio Right. In reality, the conservative movement's weakness was demonstrated by the fact its most prominent spokesmen found themselves in the position of supporting Romney in the first place. When establishment conservatives needed to find an alternative to McCain, where could they turn? They could either try to prop up a few lowly congressmen, members of a body that hasn't sent a man directly to the White House since James Garfield, or attempt to rehabilitate Romney.

Since 1964, the Republican Party has nominated exactly two movement conservatives for president. Only one has been elected. As soon as 1988, the GOP picked a pre-Reagan Republican as its standard-bearer over the more conservative Jack Kemp, Pete du Pont, and Pat Robertson. Republicans waged the last five presidential elections with either a

Bush or Dole at the top of the ticket. Movement conservatives were complicit in each defeat of a candidate to the right of the eventual Republican nominee.

In 1995-96, for instance, the *Weekly Standard* flirted with supporting such imaginary candidates as self-described Rockefeller Republican Colin Powell before turning to the not especially conservative Lamar Alexander. *National Review* endorsed Phil Gramm too late to do much good. It was little surprise when Bob Dole ended up beating several candidates with closer ties to conservatives.

Given this history, some of the newfound purity of pro-Romney conservatives is a little hard to take. Conservative commentators like Ann Coulter and Rush Limbaugh may now conclude that it would be better to have Hillary in the White House than the presumptive Republican nominee. But they were willing to support a candidate whose record over the course of his career has been even less conservative, as well as the president who agreed with most of McCain's deviations from the Right.

Unlike such organizations as the National Right to Life Committee and the National Rifle Association, which make most of their determinations of whom to support based on the candidate's past record, some of the most vocal conservative talkers seem to prefer those who are most solicitous of the movement. As the blogger Dan Flynn memorably put it, "McCain's biggest sin to movement conservatives, it seems, is not kissing the ring."

By accepting Romney's conservative credentials based on speeches given to GOP audiences in 2006-08, it became difficult to take seriously the Right's denunciations of McCain. Nor will it be easy for McCain's conservative critics to now assert that soothing speeches will not be enough to win their votes.

Let's assume for the sake of argument, however, that Mitt Romney's conserva-

tive convictions were stronger than his Massachusetts record indicates, that he was pandering then rather than now. Even in the Bay State, Romney was to the right of his last three GOP predecessors. By assenting to the idea that staying the course in Iraq trumps all other considerations, we now have the clearest example of the cost to the domestic conservative agenda. After comparing his own race against McCain to the Reagan-Ford contest of 1976, Romney concluded, "But there is an important difference from 1976: today we are a nation at war."

Thus the top-tier Republican who defended the fullest range of domestic conservative positions—and was initially willing to show foreign-policy independence, at least waiting for the evidence before assessing the surge's success—bowed out of the race so as not to stand in the way of nation-building in Iraq. Even some pro-war conservatives belatedly worried that this emphasis on maintaining Iraq War consensus went too far. Radio-hawk Mark Levin complained that a pro-McCain columnist "doesn't stray much from the standard neo-conservative position, in which foreign policy rules supreme, and limited government is of little concern."

By getting out now, Romney probably spared the CPAC attendees further disappointment down the road. Give the candidate his due: were it not for Huckabee, his strategy to win the Republican nomination might well have worked. If there had been more time between Florida and Super Tuesday, Romney might have even survived Huckabee's rise. But a strategy based on symbolic conservatism, where today's speeches trump yesterday's record and having the right liberal enemies is more important than having the right accomplishments, was always going to be a loser. ■

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Rush to Judgment

The backlash against McCain reveals signs of life in the conservative movement.

By Richard B. Spencer

AS THE REPUBLICAN nomination process lumbered along for more than a year, the collection of publications, institutions, and media personalities known as the “conservative movement” found itself in a state of a dissatisfied stability. All potential frontrunners provoked some kind of displeasure, sometimes alarm. But even Rudy Giuliani’s agnosticism on *Roe* and Ron Paul’s disruption of the pro-war consensus were problems soon enough dissolved.

Then John McCain emerged as the establishment candidate, and something happened. From the conservative base—as channeled through its talk-radio and FOX News representatives—a ferocious backlash began. It was a beast that threatened to rip the senator limb from limb. Indeed, to tear apart the entire Republican coalition and feed the scraps to the Democrats.

As early as January, talk-radio hosts like Rush Limbaugh and Mark Levin started voicing disapproval of McCain as a potential nominee. Syndicated columnists, FOX celebrities like Ann Coulter and Michelle Malkin, and many at conservative-movement house organs like *National Review* and *Human Events* began targeting the senator.

By mid-February, the revolt had snowballed. Limbaugh announced that since Obama, Clinton, and McCain would be equally destructive, he’d just as soon let the GOP lose and see the Democrats “take the hit.” After McCain won Florida, he gave an “I will fight on!” concession speech on behalf of conservatism itself. Coulter pushed McCain-bashing into parody when she asserted

that if McCain got the nomination, she’d endorse Hillary—no, campaign for her!

These gestures inspired lesser coups. Much was made of the *New York Times*’s endorsement. Malkin’s discovery that McCain’s “outreach director” was the former head of the Presidential Office for Mexicans Abroad in Vicente Fox’s government was almost too perfect. Laura Ingraham piled on. At the recent Conservative Political Action Conference, a Republicans Against Maverick McCain group started; they’re serious and growing. Researchers at Townhall.com are surely busy trying to find the McCain-Rosie O’Donnell connection.

The presumed beneficiary of the rebellion was, until he dropped out, Mitt Romney. Levin made this explicit, exhorting the troops to “Rally for Romney” on *National Review Online*. Others followed suit. Thus a moderate Wall Street Republican, if ever one was, had the mantle of Goldwater thrust upon him. Of all Romney’s rebrandings, “savior of the conservative base” was not his most convincing.

Moreover, while George W. Bush is guilty of many McCainian indiscretions—amnesty for illegals, reaching out to liberals to support his big government schemes—most conservatives still abhor criticism of the president.

It’s also yet to be seen whether the McCain-haters won’t just click their heels and fall in line come November, perhaps swooning over the senator’s talk of a certain “transcendent challenge.” Blogger and Romney enthusiast Hugh Hewitt jumped on the anti-McCain bandwagon when it helped his candidate—

and then off it once McCain’s ascension was assured and Hewitt’s standing in the GOP might have been threatened.

This strange rebellion is deserving of skepticism, but it certainly amounts to much more than irrational flailing.

Coulter offered one of the more insightful comments of the season when she said that Hillary would be a better terror warrior than McCain: she supports the surge, keeps quiet about torture and Gitmo (unlike McCain), and her promises of “ending the war” are deliberately vague. The lady is not for retreating.

Beyond this, whatever one might say about the ideological integrity of Rush and friends, they have been using arguments that at least gesture toward the conservative tradition: the McCain-Feingold campaign-finance reform suppresses political speech; trial lawyers are the beneficiaries of the McCain-Kennedy-Edwards patients bill of rights; McCain has thrice backed amnesty legislation in Congress and should be expected to do the same as president.

In his apologetic for the anti-McCainites, John O’Sullivan argued that Limbaugh and Levin are right to buck the “lesser of two evils” logic of political coalitions and consider willing a GOP defeat:

Many conservatives believe that the key question in this election is: Are there to be two multiculturalist, open-borders parties or one? If McCain’s election were to make the GOP fundamentally similar to the Democrats on immigration, bilingualism, racial preferences, and all the National Question issues, that

would be a resounding historical defeat for conservatives.

To their credit, Limbaugh and Levin insist that McCain hasn't earned their vote. Coulter has said some things she simply can't take back.

The point here is not to praise commentators for saying some things that resemble passages from *The Conscience of a Conservative*, although some praise is in order. More important is that the anti-McCain revolt, accompanied by the return of some traditional arguments, has revealed fissures in the American Right that for the past six years (if not longer) remained below the surface, covered over with conviviality over the Iraq War.

As the mainstream media has picked up on the schism, they have generally described it as a battle between the conservative hardcore and the party "moderates." Super Tuesday was thus, in the words of Diane Sawyer, a "referendum on Rush" in which cooler heads prevailed.

There is a degree of truth to this. The radio talkers want to destroy liberals, and McCain was always suspect for teaming up with the likes of Kennedy, Edwards, and Lieberman. Still, such a view of the rebellion fails to take into account that the radio talkers have targeted another group of "enemies within," McCain's *éminences grises*, who are almost never described as "moderate."

As Levin raged on just before Super Tuesday, he called out the *Weekly Standard*'s Fred Barnes and Bill Kristol and the *Wall Street Journal*'s Dorothy Rabinowitz as the chief traitors pushing McCain on conservatives. As early as January, Rush was attacking Barnes and David Brooks for presiding over the "destruction of the Republican Party," the latter as the one behind an unholy Lieberman-McCain ticket. Limbaugh and Levin wouldn't dare throw out a term like "neocon," and risk sounding like Michael Moore, but the intellectual

identity of the group pushing McCain certainly isn't lost on them.

The neocons' reaction to the Arizona senator's rise is almost the polar opposite of movement conservatives'—and in many cases, they've gone after the radio talkers directly. On NPR, Brooks opined that Republican voters have spurned the once regnant loud mouths and presumably embraced the kind of politically liberal hawk of his "national greatness conservatism" dreams. Barnes, who called Rush & Co. the "talk-radio mafia," published an article urging conservatives to "grow up" and get behind the nominee, claiming that this is the only way for conservatives to keep themselves from being marginalized.

Kristol has been even more clever, expressing satisfaction with all Republican candidates and promising conservatives that they will have influence no matter who's nominated: "What it means to be a serious, successful, and mature political movement is to take men like these—one might say to take advantage of men like these—in order to advance one's principles and causes."

There's something disingenuous about these demands to compromise coupled with promises of influence. Kristol has never compromised on McCain or desired to change him. He endorsed him in 2000 and would have earlier in 2008 had McCain not stumbled out of the gates. Moreover, one wonders what "principles and causes" Kristol hopes the movement might advance while "tak[ing] advantage" of the malleable Republican candidates. Some of Kristol's past causes include removing the pro-life plank from the GOP platform and encouraging mass Third World immigration. Other *Weekly Standard* contributions to the movement include "big government conservatism" and "the conservative case for gay marriage."

The point is not to analyze again the ways neoconservatism doesn't fit into

the movement of Goldwater and Reagan. Suffice it to say that the differences are real—sometimes being a matter of priorities, sometimes much more—and that the McCain ascension has brought these fissures into stark relief. Put simply, Kristol and friends share McCain's foreign policy, and whatever objections they have to his domestic agenda are relatively unimportant.

For the past three elections, the GOP has run campaigns based on national security. Fervent support for the Iraq War, was the criterion for the conservative/non-conservative, friend/enemy distinction. Thus in movement publications like *National Review*, McCain received wrist slapping for his domestic-policy indiscretions while conservatives like Pat Buchanan, rock-solid on the home-front but antiwar, were excommunicated. At some level, it must be dawning on pundits that support for the war above all eventually delivers Republican candidates who are reliably militant but terrible on everything else. Surely the images from Florida of a triumphant McCain flanked by Joe Lieberman, Al Gore's running mate, must have hammered this point home.

McCain might be exactly the kind of disaster candidate the anti-McCainites deserve. But then this doesn't mean that the talk-radio rebellion isn't healthy for the movement. Any counterattack against the neocons will be limited in scope for the simple reasons that they are well ensconced and the radio talkers are not close to rethinking their commitment to the Iraq War. The clash will continue to be over priorities. Nevertheless, the fact that major pundits of the Right are willing to stand against McCain offers a bit of hope that the conservative movement might become something more than just a war party. ■

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Pardon the Ex-President

Bill Clinton spent his public life making a legacy and his legacy years making money. What trouble will he make for Hillary?

By Nicholas von Hoffman

BILL CLINTON fought so hard against becoming an ex-president in his trial in the Senate that he may not have thought about how an ex ought to behave when his time in office was up.

There are models he might have copied. He might have meditated on the post-White House years of John Quincy Adams, who left the presidency to become a congressman and such an unflinching champion of free speech and abolitionism that he was nicknamed "Old Man Eloquent." (Bill, on the other hand, is at risk of being remembered as Old Man Delinquent.)

Thanks to his intransigence, Adams achieved a post-White House unpopularity eclipsing that of Jimmy Carter, an ex-president who is able to irritate even those who are in wholehearted agreement with him. Carter is a man much admired for what he does even though, when he flashes that nasty sweet smile, he drives people nuts. Like Adams, an easy man to admire, a hard man to like. (With Bill, it's the other way around.)

Herbert Hoover's chief function, in the decade after his defeated attempt at re-election in 1932, was to be a football for the Democrats. But redemption came to Hoover when Harry Truman asked him to head an effort to devise a plan to reorganize the federal government. The Hoover Commission was as much of a success as anyone could have asked for, taking into account the inevitabilities of politics and the jackass factor in human events.

Former presidents can do great things or cause havoc. Theodore Roosevelt was a major wrecker of havoc. After leaving office he split the Republican Party in two, causing the election of Democrat Woodrow Wilson. With the outbreak of World War I, the rip-snorting ex-prexy tramped back and forth across the country, denouncing Wilson as a poltroon for not joining the fray. Unlike today's politicians, TR paid for his bellicosity when he lost a son in the war he did so much to precipitate.

Some ex-presidents have been content to retire to their desks to write books, all but one of which are of interest to no one other than graduate students. Ulysses S. Grant's autobiography stands alone as a work of quality; Bill Clinton's, after a mixed reception, appears to have been relegated to the stack of rarely read former presidential effusions.

Like Clinton, Richard Nixon also left the White House in disgrace, but the latter spent his post-presidential years working to get back into good odor. Bill Clinton, who doesn't seem to have recognized the truly low opinion he was held in, not only by his political opponents but also by the yallerest of yaller-dog Democrats, has spent no time atoning. If you haven't sinned you are not in need of redemption.

Though he may sometimes look like the aging roué and disbarred lawyer he is, the smiling, toe-tapping Bill we see on TV acts as though he were in a perpet-

ual state of grace. In their post White House years, Wilson, Coolidge, Truman, Eisenhower, Johnson, and Nixon lived as though they had an obligation to conduct themselves so as to uphold the dignity of the office they had once held. Bill Clinton burst out of his eight years on Pennsylvania Avenue like a youth with a fresh college degree and a world-is-my-oyster attitude.

When, near the end of his term, Calvin Coolidge was offered dignified employment by Charlie Merrill of Merrill Lynch, he turned it down. Clinton apparently turns nothing down when the tincture of money passes his nostrils. It is as though he has sublimated his roaring libido into an unzipped drive for money.

Accurate figures are not available, but from information derived from Hillary Clinton's Senate disclosure forms, this couple, who left the White House in debt thanks to Bill's legal bills, is worth upwards of \$54 million. They are rich enough that Mrs. Clinton could write a check of \$5 million for her presidential campaign with the ease of someone sending in the monthly mortgage payment.

In the circles Bill Clinton moves in, his activities are difficult to trace, for his is a life of private jets, walled mansions, smoked windows, and deluxe hideouts whose existence is known only to the billionaires who own them and the body servants who maintain them. Nonetheless, here and there a muffled Clintonian footfall can be heard and a glimpse be

had of the ex-president pocketing the long green.

Clinton's *modus operandi* is that of the fixer, the commission man, the fee catcher who arranges introductions, often between people you would not bring home to meet mother. So we see the former president of the United States doing the bidding of InfoUSA's Vinod Gupta. InfoUSA is described as "a data-processing and marketing firm," which can mean a lot of things including, in InfoUSA's case, being accused of selling personal information to telemarketing companies who used it to bilk old people.

For whatever it is that Bill Clinton does for Mr. Gupta and his company, he has been paid millions, and the Clinton Foundation has also been the recipient of Guptatonian largesse. The whats, whos, and hows of many a private foundation are gauzed off from public view, and Mr. Clinton's is no exception, but charities have been known before to function as money-drops for politicians.

Whether the Clinton Foundation's assets are being used to make life easier for the Clintons, for political patronage purposes, or for legitimate charitable ones, neither the names of the donors nor the donors' motives are known. When the question has been put to Mrs. Clinton in the course of the campaign, she has answered that they are working on preparing the list. Why it should take months to compile a simple list of names is a puzzle unless you recall that it took years for Mrs. Clinton to produce the records of her activities at the Rose Law Firm.

In his capacity as a shill, Clinton caused a few heads to shake when it got out that in 2005 the skies above Kazakhstan were rent by William Jefferson Clinton's arrival in a private jet owned by yet another of his very rich friends, Frank Giustra. From the avail-

able evidence it appears the purpose of this trip was to open the way for Mr. Giustra to secure rights to mine uranium and, of course, to fight HIV/AIDS. The country is ruled by Nursultan Nazarbayev, a man who in a less sensitive age would have been described as an Oriental despot. But to grease the skids for the uranium concession, Clinton praised Nursultan in front of the worshipful local media for "opening up the social and political life of your country." Thanks to the globe-hopping Mr. Clinton, progress is evidently bursting out all over.

While working to advance the cause of humanity, the former president appears to have already or soon will add another \$20 million to his fortune via his association with Yucaipa Cos, a congeries of investment companies run by another dear friend, Ron Burkle. Yucaipa has periodically drawn embarrassing attention to itself as it has come out that it is connected with one Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid al-Maktoum, the non-democratically elected ruler of Dubai.

The fact that Yucaipa bases itself in the tax-sheltering Cayman Islands and has gone into business with Xinhua Finance Media Ltd. has caused Clinton to back off a little from this particular honey pot, but the man from Hope is nothing if not brazen. He brags. Whether he used to brag in the old days about his romantic accomplishments I can't say, but he has found a way to brag about his money. When he is out stumping for his wife he denounces the Bush tax cuts by telling his audiences he has so much now that they are helping him but hurting the poor chumps he is talking to. Thus he gets to boast that he is rich while siding with the poor.

As he has grown older and richer, some of his charm has faded. He smiles less and wiggles his bony finger more. His temper flares in public as it didn't used to do, which may be the result of

living a kowtowed-to life or because of the ferocity of his desire to get his wife nominated. His passion for his mate's success has caused him to make impolitic remarks that someone with his enormous political skills ought not to make. But Bill is on the prowl, and the lust for the object of his desires or ambitions sometimes takes him over, as it has before.

The campaign he and his wife are waging is like no other. On some days it's unclear who the candidate might be. It could be Hillary being the precedent-shattering woman, or it could be Bill running for a third term. If elected, they have not spelled out who is going to be how much of a president.

Should it work out that his wife is elected, Bill Clinton will have come back to the place on Pennsylvania Avenue he may look on as his ancestral home. But he is not going to go through four years without pulling a sensational turn or two. He is too restless, too intelligent, too grabby a man and too ruled by his appetites to lay low for 48 consecutive months unless she can harness him to a treadmill in the basement.

Or maybe this description is wrong and we will have a president and ex-president living harmoniously in the White House, adhering to their proper roles, she governing with wisdom and magnanimity, he living like Eisenhower in the after years at Gettysburg Farm with dignity and a little golf.

But don't count on it. In his glory days, Bill Clinton was famous for saying I feel your pain. In his retirement, he is famous for being one. ■

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Look Homeward

The identification of the Republican Party with conservative institutions has become so complete that establishment leaders react to candidates in the GOP

primaries as if the eventual Republican nominee were the *de facto* head of the movement as well.

As the repudiation of John McCain in the Kansas and Washington caucuses shows, conservative activists are angry that McCain, who is unacceptable to them on many counts (and even more so to antiwar conservatives), has become the presumptive nominee. This frustration stems in part from many conservatives' continued embrace of the sitting president and their strange impulse to anoint his successor as the leading representative of conservatism. Both before and after Mitt Romney's sudden withdrawal, many prominent movement figures were trying to declare him their leader in the same way that conservatives adopted another wealthy, moderate Republican as their standard-bearer in 2000. They fail to see that this is exactly how they enabled Mr. Bush to do so much damage to the reputation of conservatism and to the country.

Currently, the GOP coalition is much less "conservative" than it was ten years ago, yet today far more Republicans use the word to describe themselves. This does not represent the triumph of conservative principles so much as the dilution of the term. The name has become a marker and proof of some right to belong, but has consequently become much less significant. We are experiencing the confusion that inevitably follows the overuse of a term that empties it of all meaning.

McCain's critics fear a redefinition of conservatism once he is nominated, but this anxiety would be baseless if so many

of them had not for the last seven years contorted arguments of the traditional Right to defend Bush administration policies. For this reason, conservatives feel a certain relief that talk-radio hosts and pundits failed to rally support for Romney, as McCain's nomination shows the stark reality that party interests and constituencies are not necessarily theirs. It is doubtful that the concerns of conservatives and the GOP have ever coincided entirely, but because they have so diverged in recent years, conservatives need a different relationship with the party if they are to preserve the goods and institutions they want to defend.

If the movement is not going to be an appendage of the GOP in the future, its leaders will need to recognize that the outcome of the Republican nomination contest does not have to define the future of the movement. Its support for a given Republican administration should never be foreordained. That may yield some better results on policy, since it makes it harder for the party to take movement support or acquiescence for granted.

If conservatives allow their priorities to be dictated by transient political needs of the GOP, they will find themselves increasingly dissatisfied with the direction of their movement. They will also be unable to speak out credibly against Republican follies and failures. Without that independence, they will find themselves, as many do today, complicit in the errors of the party.

This political autonomy should not simply be a rhetorical or a scapegoating tactic when things go wrong. It must

rather be a consistent strategy of keeping a healthy distance from a party organization that may have certain common goals but also interests that do not always align. If such a path were taken, there would be much less anxiety every four years about the dangers of "redefining conservatism" for political ends. There would also be much less danger of allying conservatism with revolutionary and destructive policies out of some misguided sense of partisan solidarity.

An important step in the direction of independence would be moving conservative institutions away from Washington. As with every kind of decentralist approach, this would make conservative institutions more aware of different conditions around the country and reintroduce them to local and regional perspectives, as well as removing them to some degree from the influence of the party leadership. This reorganization would then also give greater incentives to pursue and defend actual political and economic decentralization. When movement institutions have no concrete interest in localism, they will acquiesce to centralist policies that are ostensibly pursued for "conservative ends" but actually subvert the natural affinities that are fundamental to realizing those goals.

If we remember that conservatism is a temperament, a disposition and a series of mental and cultural habits rather than a programmatic agenda, we will find that more lasting accomplishments are possible in our homes and neighborhoods than in conventional political activism. This does not mean abandoning political affairs or ignoring the distorting and corrupting effects of the concentration of power, which must still be combated. It does, however, require a significant reorientation—homeward. ■

Arts & Letters

FILM

[*The Diving Bell and the Butterfly*]

The Beholder of the Eye

By Steve Sailer

DESPITE DESERVED Oscar nominations for Best Direction, Adapted Screenplay, Editing, and Cinematography, “*The Diving Bell and the Butterfly*,” a sophisticated triumph of the human spirit movie, hasn’t been able to break out of the art-house ghetto. Its ponderous title, which is both too literary and too literal (and mistranslated to boot), can’t have helped.

The film is based on a charming memoir written, incredibly, by a man able to move only his left eyelid. Jean-Dominique Bauby, the 43-year-old editor of the fashion magazine *Elle*, suffered a massive brain stem stroke while test-driving next year’s model BMW. When he awoke from his coma, he was informed that he suffered, permanently, from “*maladie de l’immuré vivant*,” or “locked-in syndrome.”

The unfortunate title (*Le Scaphandre et le Papillon* in this subtitled film’s original French) comes from Bauby’s metaphorical contrast of his body, which felt like it was encased in one of those vintage pressurized diving suits—not a “diving bell,” which is an open-bottomed structure—with his mind, which could float like a butterfly through his luxurious memories. He could even

relish new sights and (being French) smells. Indeed, *The Diving Bell* is an ode to the French genius for enjoying small pleasures.

“Blink” would have been a simpler, more evocative title because his speech therapist taught him to communicate using his eyelid. She would repeat the alphabet (re-sorted in order of frequency of use in French) until he blinked his one good eye to stop her at the right letter.

Director Julian Schnabel, the New York artist turned moviemaker, employs prodigious imagination to liven up the proceedings, filming many scenes from Bauby’s perspective. Nevertheless, “*The Diving Bell*’s” pace is necessarily languid. With time on my hands, I wondered if Morse Code, which POW Jeremiah Denton used to blink “t-o-r-t-u-r-e” on North Vietnamese television, wouldn’t have been faster.

Bauby composed his text in his head each morning, memorized it, and then dictated it to a secretary for three hours per day for two months. His short book of about 25,000 words was published in 1997 to rapturous reviews two days before his death.

It’s a wonderful story, but is it true? Journalist Susannah Herbert has raised doubts in the *Times* of London, pointing out that Bauby’s “secretary,” the self-effacing Claude Mendibil, is a professional ghostwriter, who refused to show her the original notebooks.

I calculate that to complete a first draft in two months, Bauby would have had to dictate 135 words per hour (or one letter every five or six seconds). That would be difficult, but not impossible, because Mendibil would often correctly guess many word endings. So I won’t reject the movie’s authenticity,

especially because I want to believe that the story is true. (Certainly, though, Mendibil deserves credit she’s never claimed for the sheen of the final draft.)

One irony of the film is the attitude of veteran screenwriter Ronald Harwood (“*The Pianist*”) toward his hero: “But there was something about him and his lifestyle that I didn’t like: He was indifferent to the mother of his children, and that whole glamorous *Elle* magazine lifestyle ... is not so admirable, is it?” To emphasize the scurrilousness of Bauby’s abandonment of his old mistress for his new mistress, Harwood adds a third adorable small child to the two he actually left behind.

Perhaps Harwood suspects Bauby’s stroke was brought on by the favorite hobby of skinny fashionistas, but I can find no evidence online for cocaine use. Similarly, when I had cancer in 1997, acquaintances who didn’t smoke would ask my wife if I did. When she’d reply, “No,” they’d go away looking pensive. Everybody deep down wants to believe that the sick brought their illnesses on themselves, because that means that, if you’re careful, you’ll never die.

Harwell had to invent for Bauby an emotional arc from initial suicidal depression to the recovery of his will to live because the book portrays him as remarkably chipper throughout his ordeal, espousing a Nabokovian delight in the visual details he could espy from his bed and wheelchair. The film rather misses the point that as a man of fashion, and French fashion at that, Bauby believed in the moral duty of sustaining a classy facade. Thus he insisted on being dressed each day in his own stylish clothes, noting, “If I must drool, I may as well drool on cashmere.” ■

Rated PG-13 for nudity, sexual content, and some language.

BOOKS

[*The Great Awakening: Reviving Faith & Politics in a Post-Religious Right America*, Jim Wallis, HarperOne, 352 pages]

Out for Justice

By Peter Suderman

"ADMITTEDLY," Jim Wallis begins *The Great Awakening*, his newest manifesto on religion and politics, "religion can be a confusing subject." It's a telling admission, yet it might have been more accurate had it been presented as a warning to anyone hoping to come away from the book with a clearer view of the role of faith in public life.

Hopelessly jumbled and largely substance free on both policy and theology, *The Great Awakening* is a masterpiece of wishful thinking from a man desperate to reconcile his lifelong faith with his progressive politics. In the end, the only thing that is clear is that when it comes to religion, Wallis is indeed confused.

He is the front man for a movement that urges Christians to shuck their affiliation with the Religious Right and adopt progressive politics—the closest thing to a rock star the movement has produced. Just as Jerry Falwell and James Dobson have become synonymous with Christian conservatism, Wallis has, over the past few years, become the go-to pundit for faith-based liberalism, as well as a strategist of sorts on the ways in which the Democratic Party might make inroads with the evangelical community.

Wallis claims he's not partisan but an independent above the fray. He says he's "in no party's pocket" and that what he proposes is "not necessarily a shift to the left." But even a passing glance at his favored policy positions says otherwise. He supports increased federal and state poverty assistance, substantial increases in foreign aid, loosening of

border restrictions, civil unions for gay couples, a robust program aimed at carbon reduction, and greater internationalism—all in the name of his great, abiding concern: social justice. Moreover, he explicitly sets himself up as an alternative to the Religious Right, which he sees as having twisted the role of faith in public policy.

Despite having written several books on the subject, Wallis has never been able to present a coherent view of how government and religion ought to interact. "There is a biblical role for the state, just as there is for the church, and they are not the same," he writes, but the details of those roles are never fully or clearly articulated.

On one hand, the book makes a strong case for government that is heavily influenced by religious belief. Wallis hankers for a "political agenda drawn ... from our deepest moral values." He wants "religious convictions" to be "translated into moral arguments, which must win the political debate." His stated purpose is "to explore the prospects for a revival of faith that changes politics." He argues that issues such as immigration are, in fact, "religious issues." Clearly, he wants religious communities to work through and with the government toward religious goals and wants faith and its advocates to make a definite impact on public policy.

Or does he? Wallis warns, "it is a tactic of religious fundamentalism ... to try to make the state an enforcer of religious belief and practice, and it is always dangerous." The church, he insists, must maintain its "independence and separation from any state." And while he feels that religion ought to play a deciding role on issues that energize him, like immigration and Third World poverty, he seems to think that on other issues Christians should accept compromise. On abortion, for example, he cautions opponents against pushing too hard to outlaw the practice, suggesting that their efforts might be divisive. He approvingly quotes someone calling the practice "a necessary evil." (Where is it

in the Bible, I wonder, that Jesus shrugged his shoulders and sighed, "Look, sometimes evil is necessary. Let's just try to minimize it.") Government and religion, then, are to work hand in hand to achieve moral goals—except, well, when they shouldn't.

If his vision of the role of government seems muddled, perhaps that's because it's grounded on such a shallow foundation. For when it comes to the minutiae of public policy, Wallis is simply lost. In each of the chapters devoted to policy, he begins by quoting a few Bible verses, goes on to claim that whatever it is he's talking about is a moral issue, and then more or less assumes the argument is over. Almost all of his actual policy arguments are outsourced, with substantial chunks of others' work simply copied into the text, usually with only a line or two of summary on his part to break it up. He often notes that the policy issues are "complex," but never makes much of an attempt to explicate them.

What's more, he proposes almost nothing of substance to solve the problems he identifies. In order to deal with poverty, for example, he says that there are "three critical steps." These turn out to be "compassion for the poor," "the call for social justice," and "the movement into solidarity ... with the poor." Far from critical steps, these are inane moral signifiers that offer no concrete way of reducing poverty. By this point, though, Wallis has already given up the game: one of his "rules of engagement" for Christians is "faithfulness comes before effectiveness." So much for making a difference.

Instead of substantive policy prescriptions, Wallis falls back on repeated calls for America's faithful to generate the "moral and political will" to solve its problems (and the rest of the world's). He apparently thinks that if everyone simply believes enough, cares enough, hopes enough, things will fix themselves.

Perhaps Wallis's lack of concern for the details of public policy can be forgiven. He is, after all, a preacher, not a

policy wonk. One might reasonably expect, then, that his strength would lie in words. "Language is important," he admonishes those who wish to share their ideas with others. But if language is so important to him, why is he so frequently sloppy with it?

Wallis writes that he wants Christian progressives to move "from sound bites to sound strategy, and from rhetoric to results." That he delivered this wish in a compact sound bite ought to be evidence enough that he is still stuck, flailing, in the realm of rhetoric—and mostly trite rhetoric at that.

Throughout the book, he traffics in hollow boosterism, repeating dull phrases that mean nothing and add little to his argument. Besides his many invocations of "moral and political will," we are treated to an endless stream of vapid maxims. Over the space of just six pages, he writes that he "can feel a new momentum and movement." He tells us that the future "is feeling very bright to me" and that "a fresh dialog about how to apply faith to social justice is springing up across the land." One of his trips is described as a "dramatic demonstration of a sea change that will be significant for both faith and politics in America." Later, he finds himself thrilled that certain issues are "provoking a deeper and healthier dialog." This is rhetorical cotton candy, fluffy and empty, but it's all that Wallis has to carry the book forward. Without clear direction, he lets his ideas sail on wave after wave of vanilla uplift.

And when he is not peppering his paragraphs with bland sentiment, Wallis fills them from his endless well of questions.

If globalization is unstoppable, what are the moral ethics of globalization? Do unfettered economic growth and unlimited corporate profits really serve everybody best? Should there be any rules and, if so, whom should they protect? What are the ethics for such nations in their relationship with the poor countries for their own

development and for the problems of the rest of the world? Is free trade the goal, or should it be fair and just trade? And how do individuals and communities make trade justice possible? In an interconnected world, how do we develop a new moral ethic for globalization?

Wallis does not proceed to answer any of these questions. He never even tries. No, he follows with yet another, even longer, string of questions. Indeed, the paragraph above comes near the end of a chapter. For him, questions are not a starting point; they are the conclusion.

Of course answers were never the point. Wallis's goal is to square the two things that have defined his life—his Christian faith and his progressive politics. But in any personal battle between the twin masters of government and religion, one will almost always lose. For Wallis, politics seems to have come out on top.

Despite his claims of independence, he is in some ways a tool used by the Left to promote a liberal agenda that has little use for faith except for its potential

party's recent friendliness toward religion can be chalked up in part to "soul-searching," but also to having done "some political math." For all his passion, Wallis merely helps them run the numbers.

That's not to say he doesn't go along willingly. In fact, he courts the role by neutering Christianity into something so bland not even Christopher Hitchens could find cause for worry. On multiple occasions, he declares, "religion has no monopoly on morality." He also says that "Jesus being the Son of God does not mean that Christians are ... more suited to govern and decide political matters than non-Christians," which is strange considering how much energy he devotes to arguing that religious people ought to rely on their beliefs to help them decide political matters. This serves as a message to the secular world: "There's no reason to fear us; we don't even know what we're talking about."

As he attaches qualification after qualification to what religion can—and mostly can't—do, one begins to feel sympathy for Wallis. When you've based your entire life on something that

HE NEUTERS CHRISTIANITY INTO SOMETHING SO BLAND NOT EVEN CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS COULD FIND CAUSE FOR WORRY.

to rally political allies. The Democratic Party has increasingly become a secular institution that caters ever more to the non-religious. The Pew Forum on Religion and Public life reported that in 2006, for example, 67 percent of voters who never attend church voted Democratic, up from 55 percent four years previous. Among party activists hostility toward religion is common, especially on the Internet.

But the Democrats are not above throwing a bone to the country's believers if it will help them in the polls, which explains some of the stilted God-talk emanating from candidates and party leaders. Wallis almost admits as much in the book, writing that some of the

has such a weak conviction in its own truth and morality, on a belief system that can hardly muster the strength to argue for its own correctness, it must be maddening. No wonder he's confused.

"Something is happening," Wallis intones several times throughout the book, seemingly as much to convince himself as his readers. But after 309 pages of moral admonishing, vacuous principles, and cheerleading for progressive politics, I still have no idea what, and I suspect that, for all his fervor, Wallis doesn't either. ■

Peter Suderman is associate editor of Doublethink.

[Robert Frost: The Poet as Philosopher, Peter J. Stanlis, 151, 400 pages]

The Poet as Conservative

By W. Wesley McDonald

ALTHOUGH ROBERT FROST was one of the most popular poets of the 20th century, he remains something of an enigma. His official biographer, Lawrance Thompson, plainly disliked him and presented a cruel, lonely, and angry misanthrope. More sympathetic biographies have appeared since this act of “deliberate character assassination,” as Stanlis describes it, but the adverse image created by Thompson persists.

Moreover, even Frost’s admirers have paid insufficient attention to the philosophy that informed his work. The purpose of this extensive and detailed study is both to rescue the poet from his detractors and to provide a profound analysis of the unifying ideas that underpinned his work.

My earliest recollection of the four-time Pulitzer Prize winner was at John F. Kennedy’s inauguration in 1961. On that bitter, blustery January day, Frost struggled vainly to read his poem, “Dedication,” composed especially for the occasion. Blinded by the intense glare of the snow-reflected sun, he eventually gave up and instead recited “The Gift Outright” from memory.

As a rabid 14-year-old Republican, I presumed Frost was a liberal Democrat. Of course, my opinion had nothing to do with what he said on that memorable day. Yet Frost, though an ardent Democrat, was no liberal. No president since Grover Cleveland had pleased him. He defended localism, custom, prescriptive institutions, individual self-reliance, and social hierarchy against the collectivizing and centralizing orientation of the Roosevelt administration. He was fond of Edmund Burke and harshly critical of progressivism, utilitarianism, Social

Darwinism, and every kind of collectivist ideology. As he wrote in his poem “Build Soil—A Political Pastoral,” he was a “states-rights free-trade Democrat,” a predilection, he observed elsewhere, inherited from his father and grandfather. Such Democrats today have gone the way of the dodo.

Peter Stanlis met Frost in 1939 at the Bread Loaf Graduate School of English in Ripon, Vermont. Their relationship continued for 23 years, and Stanlis came to know Frost as a mentor and friend. In this book, Stanlis draws liberally from their frequent conversations. In 1941, the young student promised his teacher that he would write a book about his poetry and philosophical beliefs. Little did Stanlis suspect that it would take 60 years to fulfill his promise.

Frost was inadvertently responsible for the long delay. Stanlis mentioned to his professor Louis I. Bredvold of the University of Michigan that he had heard Frost praise Burke. A widely published Burke scholar, Bredvold persuaded Stanlis to write his dissertation on Burke. A revised version of Stanlis’s work was published as *Edmund Burke and the Natural Law* (1958), a seminal book, now in its fourth edition, that has substantially influenced Burke scholarship.

Stanlis rejected studies of Burke that had depicted him as a conservative utilitarian. He argued that Burke’s thought was rooted firmly in the Classic Natural Law tradition. “In practical politics,” Stanlis said elsewhere, “this counter-revolutionary interpretation of Burke became the basis for the conservative movement in modern American politics, first advanced by Russell Kirk in *The Conservative Mind* (1953), until it was subverted by the self-styled neo-conservatives.”

For decades, Stanlis’s work on Burke distracted him from his promise to Frost. For 13 years he published and edited a journal, *Studies in Burke and His Time*. He also wrote 23 articles, edited or wrote seven books on Burke, and co-authored an annotated bibliography of everything written by and about Burke. He remains the foremost living Burke scholar. “It is

incongruous,” he admits, “that Frost’s high praise of Burke’s politics in the 1940s should have resulted in my commitment to so much scholarship on Burke that it led me to consistently postpone my promise to Frost that I would write a book on his art and philosophical beliefs.”

The focus of *The Poet as Philosopher* is the dualism in Frost’s poetry and teaching. “My subject is Robert Frost’s philosophy,” he explains, “and my thesis is that dualism provides the whole basis of his total unsystematic philosophical view of reality.” Dualism is essential to comprehending Frost’s views on religion, science, and poetry. “Dualism as the basis of Frost’s philosophy,” Stanlis stresses, “is the foremost single element that scholars and literary critics need to consider in any study of his life and thought, including the themes of his poetry.” Most scholars have either ignored or failed to grasp this vital element of Frost’s work.

SACRILEGE
SEXUAL ABUSE IN
THE CATHOLIC CHURCH
LEON J. PODLES

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Philosophical dualism entails the view that all reality "consists of two distinct, absolute, and all-inclusive elements, most commonly identified as matter and mind, or as Frost preferred, matter and spirit." Accepting the God-given condition that all things are endlessly paired in everlasting opposition, Frost was convinced of "the difficulty or impossibility of resolving complex religious, moral, intellectual, and social problems through well-intentioned but simple monistic assumptions, methods, or conclusions." Examples of opposites include rights-duties, hot-cold, God-Devil, woman-man, war-peace, day-night, fact-fiction, motion-rest, whole-part, and so forth endlessly. Frost believed, Stanlis elaborates, "that all sound thinking was essentially metaphorical ... involving comparisons, contrasts, parallels, conflicts, contradictions, ambiguities, and so forth, within a vast range of interactions between matter and spirit." His dualistic view of reality was the link between his poetry and teaching.

The opposite of dualism is monism. For the monist, reality consists of just one element. The pre-Socratic thinkers, Plato and modern ideologists are monists. They seek "to harmonize, reconcile, integrate, and synthesize those apparent opposites and unify them into an organic whole." Modern ideologists

beings, in other words, were divinely created out of animal life. He went beyond Darwin's purely biological account to stress the importance of culture and tradition in shaping man. Rather than being a slave to the impersonal forces of nature, man plays a significant role in his own evolution. Man

FROST AND KIRK HELD SIMILAR VIEWS ON THE SOCIAL NATURE OF MAN AND THE INDISPENSABILITY OF CUSTOM AND TRADITION FOR CIVILIZED EXISTENCE.

employ reason as an instrument to acquire knowledge for the purpose of guiding mankind toward a single world government. Frost thought their pernicious influence ineluctably led to absolutism and fanaticism.

The chapter on Frost's views about biological evolution is of particular interest. Frost's insights on this controversial issue could be a useful addition to the debate about "intelligent design" and evolution. He saw no real conflict between religion and science. Charles Darwin is often perceived as an atheist who thought that reality consists of matter alone. Social Darwinists such as Herbert Spencer, pseudo-Darwinists, and the scientific materialist Thomas Henry Huxle, have spawned such distorted versions of Darwin's theory of evolution. But Darwin was, in fact, a theist who never accepted the materialist concept of reality. He did not believe that natural selection alone was responsible for the modifications of species. The impersonal, phenomenal forces of Nature do not explain evolutionary change. The creative power of both God and man plays a role. Frost had a highly favorable opinion of Darwin and blamed Huxley and Spencer for misrepresenting the theory of evolution. He preferred what he called "creative evolution" as an alternative explanation to the materialistic and atheist theories that claimed evolution was driven by laws of natural selection and "survival of the fittest." "You say, God made man of mud, and I think God made man of prepared mud," he often said. Human

is not driven purely by the biological lust to reproduce; he possesses the free will to choose with whom he mates. This capacity to choose, what Frost called "passionate preference," involves "man's social, moral, and religious conception of love in a divinely ordained institution of marriage."

One striking characteristic of Frost's social, moral and political thought is how closely it resembles that of Russell Kirk. Frost and Kirk held similar views on the social nature of man and the indispensability of custom and tradition for civilized existence. They also shared a distaste for collectivizing and egalitarian ideologies, a preference for the agrarian way of life, an appreciation of Burke, and an opposition to most of the innovative trends in college and university instruction.

They both abhorred what Kirk called "defecated reason," which entails the belief that all things can be understood and all problems solved through mathematical and scientific process. Frost and Kirk saw that the most important things, such as God and moral norms, lie beyond the power of reason. People act independently of any empirical evidence or mathematical method. They cannot prove what they believe. Prejudice, by necessity, precedes judgment. Like Burke, both Frost and Kirk recognized the value of prejudice for social life. Frost stressed that the inherited wisdom of our ancestors, embodied in our prejudices, favors family, community, church and state. "Prejudice is part of every person's entailed inheritance," he main-

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tained, criticizing the tendency to dismiss prejudice as superstition.

On questions of educational reform, Kirk and Frost called themselves “radicals.” They deplored the replacement of the traditional college curriculum based in the classics and humanities with mere vocational training. Both detested the progressive educational theories of John Dewey, which, Frost believed, undermined the discipline and sense of tradition essential to effective instruction, and rendered students’ minds into empty vessels to be filled with their instructor’s ideological preferences. They believed that colleges offered little of value to the truly talented mind.

Despite these similarities between Kirk and Frost’s conservatism, I can find little evidence of mutual influence. Frost’s ideas were fully formed decades before Kirk began his active writing. During my long association with Kirk, I don’t recall him ever mentioning Frost. Although he quotes Frost’s poetry once in *The Conservative Mind*, he was not deeply read in it. In his memoirs, *The Sword of Imagination* (1994), Kirk mentions Frost only three times, and then only in passing. He praised the poet for remaining a man of letters rather than venturing into politics. Moreover, he noted that Frost “exercised a subtle influence for political sound sense that will endure” while in *The Conservative Mind* he declared that Frost’s “political conservatism is undeniable.”

Stanlis’s magnificent and admiring study of his teacher corrects Thompson’s distorted image of Frost as a “moral monster.” Like Edmund Burke, T.S. Eliot, and Kirk, Frost embraced the “permanent things” in an age of ideology. He was, as Stanlis has demonstrated in this impressively documented examination of Frost’s philosophy, one of the principal champions of the moral imagination in 20th-century American letters. ■

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MUSIC

Stuffing the Jukebox

By A.G. Gancarski

ACCORDING TO THE *New York Post*, “As [Barack] Obama and his wife, Michelle, strolled triumphantly into his victory party in Des Moines, Iowa, on Jan. 3, Jay-Z’s ‘99 Problems’ was blaring. In it, Jay raps, ‘I got 99 problems, but a b-tch ain’t one.’” Obama’s campaign denied the dig, but took care to maintain their candidate’s coolness quotient: “I’m sort of hip to the younger stuff,” Obama told CNN. “You know, like Beyoncé’s ‘Crazy in Love.’ That’s a good song to dance to.” The same can’t be said of Pearl Jam’s painful recycling attempt, “Rock Around Barack.” It’s as brutal and artless as the title suggests.

From the early days of the Republic, the right stump music has been essential for aspiring presidential candidates. At first, campaigns simply adapted well-known melodies to fit their slogans. But by the time ditties such as 1912’s “We’re Ready For Teddy Again” surfaced, political operators were originating jingles as slick as the popular songs of the time.

Then campaigns reverted to the old practice of borrowing familiar tunes. Truman’s “I’m Just Wild About Harry” was an update of a song written for the 1921 musical “Shuffle Along.” Frank Sinatra’s “High Hopes,” so strongly associated with Jack Kennedy’s campaign of 1960, was a knock-off of the crooner’s chart single from the year before. Same song, different lyrics: an apt metaphor for the American political process.

In recent decades, campaign music has declined even further. With a few exceptions, the current fashion is uninspiring, amiable pop. Most candidates employ music cynically. They divest

the form of power and turn it into something comparable to their speeches: bland pabulum for the credulous masses.

During the 1988 cycle, the Bush/Quayle operation employed Lee Greenwood’s execrable “God Bless the U.S.A.”—an apt expression of the Southern strategy of the campaign: ersatz patriotism over a soporific background of New Country schmaltz. Conservatives of later campaigns, observing that Greenwood’s slush had worked for Bush, used it again and again at GOP rallies, long after the song had first topped the charts.

Candidates continue to search for the sonic Holy Grail to encompass the vision, atmosphere, and values of their campaigns. Sometimes they strike the right note, as when the Clinton campaign of 1992 adopted Fleetwood Mac’s “Don’t Stop Thinking About Tomorrow.” The fact that members of the group, such as John McVie, were by then Republicans didn’t matter. The major chords and the unabashed optimism of the chorus suggested, at least for ’70s nostalgia-junkies, that “yesterday’s gone” and the Clintonian world would be “better than before.” It’s easy to heap opprobrium on this soundtrack choice, but it played well enough with voters.

Most candidates don’t get that lucky. Many rely on tracks already used by casualties of earlier campaigns. Mitt Romney walked out to the Junkie XL remix of Elvis Presley’s “A Little Less Conversation,” which had been used in the last presidential election by Howard Dean. The song was a dancefloor stormer in a certain type of club a few years back, yet its undeniable energy obviously failed to translate into electoral success.

As unsuccessful Romney’s campaign was, at least his team was able to make a decision about what tunes to play, which is more than can be said about Hillary Clinton’s advisers. Gearing up for her campaign, Senator Clinton posted a blog on her website asking the public to help her pick a song. The exercise showed exactly what is wrong with

American democracy: the public makes ineffably awful choices. If the nightmarish playlist put forward by Clinton fans is any indication of Hillary's actual musical taste, the soundtrack to Hell would be on random shuffle on her iPod.

The choices included the phony inspiration of U2's "Beautiful Day" and "City of Blinding Lights," as well as the horrifying strains of "I'm A Believer" by Smashmouth and "Right Here, Right Now" by Jesus Jones. The winning song: "You And I," a 1990s Disney ballad-style number by French-Canadian chanteuse Celine Dion. One critic rightly described it as an "uplifting but soulless choice."

Not surprisingly, Celine Dion isn't in great demand, but Tom Petty's "I Won't Back Down" has been used by would-be standard-bearers in both parties over the last two election cycles. Petty probably isn't getting royalties from the numerous times candidates have walked into some provincial hall to his accompaniment, but he deserves them, for the candidates, to borrow a phrase from Illinois's junior senator, have

games. The song itself is warmed-over Woody Guthrie, three minutes and three chords of counterfeit exploitation: the perfect counterpoint to Edwards' cornpone Mayberry twang and his cheap, lurid stories about the lowest of the low.

And then, of course, there are the candidates who play their own music. Following the example of Bill Clinton, who garnered useful publicity for a slightly-above-pedestrian sax performance during his 1992 campaign, Mike Huckabee regularly strapped on his bass guitar and played a few songs with cover bands at campaign stops. The Elks Lodge in Cedar Rapids, Iowa heard "Blue Suede Shoes." A rally in Henniker, New Hampshire got a long set of tired standards—"Mustang Sally," "Midnight Hour" and "Put a Little Love in Your Heart"—with local rockers Mama Kicks. Huckabee's bassline was buried in the drum-heavy mix.

The good reverend seems to be that most noxious of southern stereotypes: the "cool" Baptist preacher using lame approximations of youth culture to try to get in with the kids. It might work

is already a huge draw with blacks and understands that to win the presidency, he has to run to the center. He chooses his music accordingly. No 50 Cent or Three-Six Mafia—and apparently no Jay-Z. The vast majority of his soundtrack seems to have been selected to project inclusiveness. He often closes with a new-country twanger.

It is possible for politicians to go too far in trying to use the contemporary aesthetic to their advantage. When Hillary Clinton appeared on the "Tyra Banks" show recently, the former supermodel asked, "What type of dancing do you do? Do you do hip-hop? Can you do the Soulja Boy or the Spongebob dance?" Clinton's response was somewhat implausible: "I have heard of those. I think that is a variation of what I did like 30 or 40 years ago." If only Bob Dole had had the foresight to make the same claim about rave dancing in 1996, he might have limited Hillary's husband to only one term in the White House.

Of course, the man Dole endorsed, Republican frontrunner John McCain, is arguably the candidate most hamstrung by the politics of song selection. McCain has used songs by both the aforementioned Tom Petty and John Mellencamp—and both artists objected. To avoid further embarrassments of this type, perhaps the senior senator would be better off sticking with dead musicians—Kurt Cobain, Jeff Buckley, Nick Drake, maybe that guy from Milli Vanilli.

In the two George W. Bush campaigns, musical choice was limited by the so-called Rove Rule, which dictated, "If Karl hasn't heard it, we don't use it." No doubt similar rules exist in every political operation, ensuring that—despite Obama's brave efforts and Hillary's apparent familiarity with Soulja Boy—campaign music will continue to underwhelm. Just as we can expect empty stump rhetoric from the frontrunners of each party, we can rely on them to score it with inoffensive, middle-of-the-road music. ■

A.G. Gancarski writes from Jacksonville, Florida.

COUGAR HIMSELF MAY HAVE BEEN A **HIGH-PROFILE EDWARDS SUPPORTER**, USING A SONG WITH THE CHORUS "THIS IS OUR COUNTRY" IN A **DEMOCRATIC CONTEST DOMINATED BY A WOMAN AND A BLACK MAN** WAS A PROFOUNDLY BAD IDEA.

"boiled all the hope out of" the once enjoyable song. If their intention is to project an aura of gritty, steely-eyed resolution, they'll need more than a record.

John Edwards, the noted soundbite populist, inadvertently exposed how weak his campaign was when he settled on John Cougar Mellencamp's "Our Country." While Cougar himself may have been a high-profile Edwards supporter, using a song with the chorus "this is our country" in a Democratic contest dominated by a woman and a black man was a profoundly bad idea.

For millions of sports fans, "Our Country" will always be irritatingly associated with Chevrolet commercials shown during pivotal moments of NFL

with charitable evangelicals, but for conservatives of every other stripe the whole shtick is anathema.

The candidate best playing music to his advantage this election cycle is Illinois hopemonger Barack Obama. His use of soul classics such as Stevie Wonder's paean to organized labor "Signed, Sealed, Delivered [I'm Yours]"—also used by McCain in Michigan—and Curtis Mayfield's "Move On Up" has provided a refreshing contrast to the turgid choices of his rivals.

The senator has spoken of the "artistry" of hip-hop, while simultaneously decrying the nihilism of its "message"—a classic example of a politician taking both sides of an issue. But Obama

The Marathoner's Race

NORFOLK, VA.—I think it's safe to say that the Republican establishment doesn't want Mike Huckabee to be the GOP nominee. Good. The blessing of party

panjandrum seems to be a kiss of political death.

Consider: Just a little while ago, the Republican establishment candidate was John McCain. Then last spring, McCain's campaign cratered, in large part because the Arizonan redoubled his bet on a key establishment priority, "comprehensive immigration reform." In a head-to-head contest between the establishment and a fully informed electorate, the electorate always wins.

Since then, the establishment split up in various ways. Rudy Giuliani, for example, picked up some big-state governors, such as Rick Perry of Texas, who was attracted to Giuliani's advocacy of a "virtual fence" along the Mexican border as opposed to a real fence. And of course, Giuliani won leading neoconservatives to his side, such as Norman Podhoretz and David Frum.

Meanwhile, Mitt Romney made a play for social and economic conservatives, bagging quite a few big shots, including Sean Hannity, Rush Limbaugh, and *National Review*. In addition, Romney gained a quasi-endorsement from George H.W. Bush, who invited the former Massachusetts governor to deliver his "important" religion-in-American-life speech last December at the Bush Library; at that event, "41" offered an effusive introduction. If things didn't work out for Romney, it wasn't for lack of trying.

And of course, if there were any not-nailed-down establishmentarians floating around last year, Fred Thompson picked them up. During his lazy cam-

paign, Thompson roused himself sufficiently to embrace *avant-garde* Republicanism, including a Bush 43-style partial privatization of Social Security. Such ideologizing made Thompson the darling of the D.C. think-tank set—but got him nowhere with voters.

Well, gee. Now Giuliani, Romney, and Thompson are all out of the race. To be sure, McCain is back, in a big way, but only after disavowing his previous "amnesty first" stance on immigration and shedding his big-budget inside-the-Beltway campaign in favor of a low-spending, straight-talk-expressing candidacy that returned him to his maverick roots. Now a resurgent McCain, having won a bunch of primaries, is being embraced by big-state governors and big-time operatives, from Arnold Schwarzenegger to Karl Rove.

Huckabee, of course, is almost entirely unburdened by establishmentarian support. Oh, he has a few big names in his camp, but upon close inspection, those endorsers are revealed to be outside the K Street mainstream. For example, Huckabee has the support of Rep. Duncan Hunter of San Diego, the ranking member of the House Armed Services Committee. That's an insider job, to be sure, but Hunter's prickly position on building a border-security wall—he has led the fight to build a no-bull double fence all along the U.S.-Mexico border—puts him well outside the establishment fold.

Huckabee is fully aware of his situation. "I have been an underdog all my life," says the son of a fireman, who

made ends meet back in Hope, Arkansas by working a second job as a mechanic. Huckabee is still an underdog, but he's an underdog with a distinct appeal to other underdogs—which is to say, the vast bulk of Americans. As he put it recently, his key constituency is "the invisible America"—the American middle class, the folks not rich enough to worry about polar bears and not poor enough to qualify for welfare. That is, those who work hard, pay their taxes, and play by the rules—which is to say, folks who live far outside of D.C.

Thus the obvious question: will the establishment's embrace help or hinder the Republican nominee this year? Would it help the Republican Party's prospects this November to tighten up its links to, say, the incumbent White House? Should the GOP nominee be closer to Congressional earmarkers? How about snuggling up to those K Street lobbyists?

I'm not so sure. I suspect the Republican Party would be better off, November-wise, nominating someone who is independent of the status quo, someone who has not been part of Republican Washington these past eight years. Just a hunch. And in fact, Huckabee comes from a different place, not Washington. He often quotes the Book of Isaiah: "Look to the rock from which you were hewn, and to the quarry from which you were dug." That's the real Huckabee, who served as a governor for more than a decade but whose heart and soul dwell far outside the Beltway.

That's a big selling point to the country, and so that's a good thing for Republicans. If the GOP wants to win the election this year, it will need someone new. ■



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